Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Critical Study (1912)

Edward Thomas

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ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

EDWARD THOMAS

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To

WALTER DE LA MARE

"Questions, O royal traveller, are easier than answers."

THE THREE MULLA-MULGARS.

NOTE

I AM very much indebted to Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton for permission to quote from Swinburne's prose and poetry in this book, and to my friend, Mr. Clifford Bax, for many consultations.

E. T.

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I

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

It was the age of Browning's Dramatis Personæ, William Morris's Defence of Guenevere, Landor's Heroic Idylls, Tennyson's Idylls of the King, Meredith's Modern Love, Robert Buchanan's London Poems: Longfellow, Alexander Smith and Owen Meredith were great men.

The year 1864 arrived. "The poetical atmosphere was exhausted and heavy," says Professor Mackail, "like that of a sultry afternoon darkening to thunder. Out of that stagnation broke, all in a moment, the blaze and crash of *Atalanta in Calydon*. It was something quite new, quite unexampled. It revealed a new language in English, a new world as it seemed in poetry." Two years passed, and, as an Edinburgh reviewer says, "into the midst of a well-regulated and self-respecting society, much moved by Tennyson's Idylls, and altogether sympathetic with the misfortunes of the blameless King—justly appreciative of the domestic affection so tenderly portrayed by Coventry Patmore's Angel in the

House"—appreciative also of *Atalanta in Calydon*—"Mr. Swinburne charged impetuously with his *Poems and Ballads*." Some of the *Poems and Ballads*, including *Faustine*, had appeared four years earlier in the Spectator; but the poems accumulated made a fresh and astonishing effect.

The *Poems and Ballads* were interesting enough to offend many people. *Atalanta* can hardly have been interesting, though it contains an interesting story which is probably revealed to the majority of readers by the argument alone. Althæa, Queen of Calydon, gave birth to Meleager after dreaming that she had brought forth a burning brand. The Fates prophesied that he should be strong and fortunate, but should die as soon as the brand then in the fire were consumed. Althæa plucked out the brand and took care of it. Meleager sailed away with Jason and became a great warrior. But in one of his wars he gave offence to Artemis, who therefore afflicted Calydon with a terrible wild boar. Only after all the chiefs of Greece had warred against it was the boar slain, and that by the virgin Atalanta, because Artemis loved her. Meleager, enamoured of Atalanta, gave the spoil of the boar to her, thus arousing the jealousy of his mother's two brethren. These two Meleager slew because they attempted to

take away the spoil from Atalanta, which so moved Althæa to anger and sorrow that she cast the brand at length back again into the fire, and it was consumed and Meleager died; "and his mother also endured not long after for very sorrow; and this was his end, and the end of that hunting." This story is obliterated by the form of a Greek drama, by abundant lyrics put into the mouth of a Greek chorus, by Greek idioms and cast of speech, and by an exuberance and individuality of language which could not always transmit instantaneously a definite meaning. But the obscurity is not one of incompetence, the imperfectly intelligible speech is not an imperfection: at least it persuades and insinuates itself so into the mind that perhaps not many pause at the end of the first sentence, part of the Chief Huntsman's address to Artemis:—

Maiden, and mistress of the months and stars
Now folded in the flowerless fields of heaven,
Goddess whom all gods love with threefold heart,
Being treble in thy divided deity,
A light for dead men and dark hours, afoot
Swift on the hills as morning, and a hand
To all things fierce and fleet that roar and range
Mortal, with gentler shafts than snow or sleep;
Hear now and help and lift no violent hand
But favourable and fair as thine eyes beam
Hidden and shown in heaven; for I all night
Amid the king's hounds and the hunting men
Have wrought and worshipped toward thee; nor shall man

See goodlier hounds or deadlier edge of spears;
But for the end, that lies unreached at yet
Between the hands and on the knees of the Gods.

The effect must always be partly that of a translation even to those who are familiar with Greek religion; the words have a shade of the quality inseparable from a translation, whether it is or is not creative, for it is to be found in the Authorized Version of the Bible; the reader is a little confused and yet not unduly, when he hears of Artemis as a light "for dead men and dark hours," of the fair-faced sun that kills "the stars and dews and dreams and desolations of the night," for it is not English thus to collect four things of four different classes, each requiring a distinct change in the meaning of the verb which governs them all. Perhaps the reader at first accepts "hidden and shown," and even the alternative pairs, "roar and range," "snow or sleep," "favourable and fair," etc., as part of the foreignness. It does not decrease. It is not absent from:

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
The tongueless vigil and all the pain.

Only, here it is apparent that "the shadows and windy places" may be due to rhyme; at least it seems a false limiting or defining of the action of the lisp of leaves and ripple of rain, as later on "peril of shallow and firth" is a distinction with insufficient definiteness of difference. But the metre is powerful enough to overcome this difficulty, or to keep it from rising; it makes us feel that we may go astray if we ask why the nightingale is called "bright" as well as "brown." Later on it may be suspected that "bright" is due partly to Swinburne's need of alliteration, partly to his love of the "i" sound and of brightness. Anyone inclined to show and expect a stiff exactingness will be shocked at finding "summer" and not "spring," "autumn," or "winter,"—"remembrance," without "forgetfulness" and so on—in the famous lyric:

> Before the beginning of years
> There came to the making of man
> Time, with a gift of tears;
> Grief with a glass that ran;
> Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
> Summer, with flowers that fell;
> Remembrance fallen from heaven,
> And madness risen from hell.

This, however, has that appearance of precision which Swinburne always affected, which is nothing but an appearance. Nor would he have

claimed that it was anything more. He was filling his verse with solemn images acceptable to that part of the human brain which is not occupied with the music of the words and the reverberation of earlier images. It may be that Time received the "gift of tears" instead of the "glass that ran" solely for the sake of alliteration. It would doubtless be better if it were not so, but nothing can be perfect from every point of view, and this deceitful deference to the pure intellect I speak of chiefly to show what Swinburne's use of the sounds and implications of words can overcome. Reverberation of sound and meaning as in Milton's:

> Chariot and charioteer lay overturned:

and Coleridge's icicles:

> Quietly shining to the shining moon:

are a great part of *Atalanta*. Scores of times words and sounds are repeated as in:

> Saw with strange eyes and with strange lips rejoiced,
> Seeing these mine own slain of mine own, and me
> Made miserable above all miseries made:

"Breath" calls for the rhyme of "death," and "light" for "night," with more transparent purpose than in other writing; "all" demands to be repeated with a persistency that is not to be denied.

Some of the repetitions may indicate simply

the poet's infatuation with certain words, but that infatuation would not be without significance. The use of the verb and the substantive "dream" six times in eighteen lines spoken by Althæa, and the constant use of "divide" and "division" (not to speak of "sever" and "sunder"), and above all of "fire" and "light," "bright" and "shine,"—these are not accidents. "Fire" and "light," "bright" and "shine," with "desire" and "high" and "sky," and other words which their vowel sound and Swinburne's usage make cognate, were to become master words in his poetry. It can almost be said that he never writes one of those words without repeating it or matching it with one of the others. Whether it be through the influence of these words or something in the "i" sound that his nature found expressive, I cannot say, but in many of the poems in all his books it is predominant, so that when he praises a thing he must call it bright:—the wind is bright, the sea is bright:—and for him the characteristic quality of the human face is its light.

Pure repetition, also, is one of the deliberate properties of his style, repetition of an idea as in:

> O death, a little, a little while, sweet death,

or of a sound as in:

> She bore the goodliest sword of all the world,

or of both as in:

> A little since, and I was glad, and now
> I never shall be glad or sad again.

Already in *Atalanta*, and still more in later work, this unconscious leaning and conscious device, sometimes became a trick.

As Swinburne loved and used the qualities of light and fire, so he did those of other bold and splendid things. *Atalanta* is full of swift, fleet, violent, splendid, furious, thunderous, fierce, ravenous, tumultuous, tempestuous, sharp things, of foam and wind, and fire and hate, and love, hounds and horses and warriors. Meleager speaks to his mother of his father's "ploughshare" being "drawn through fatal seedland of a female field" and "furrowing her body," to beget him, so that he "sprang and cleft" her womb. When the herald describes Atalanta he says:

> . . . From her white braced shoulder the plumed shafts
> Rang, and the bow shone from her side;

and he compares Meleager to the sun that "strikes" the branches into leaf and bloom; he is "a glory among men." Death for Meleager is the "empty weary house" which lacks "beauty," "swift eyes," and "might of hands and feet": he says that there is nothing "terribler" than a mother's face. The Chorus sings of Love:

Thy wings make light in the air as the wings of a dove.
Thy feet are as wings that divide the stream of the sea;
Earth is thy covering to hide thee, the garment of thee.
Thou art swift and subtle and blind as a flame of fire;
Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of desire. . . .

The boar "cried no lesser cry" than "thunder and the roar of wintering streams." So does the poet love the extreme that he makes Meleager strike the boar in "the hairiest hollow of his hide." Where they flay the boar violets "blossom and burn" and there is a fire and light of other flowers.

Yet with all this fury and violence and fire, the play is a delicate thing, full of a refined extravagance at play with primitive and simple experiences and passions. After a speech of three pages about her murdered brothers Althæa says:

These dead
I shall want always to the day I die.

Perhaps she need have said nothing more but *Ai, ai!*

Along with the clear, visible, and tangible things are equally noticeable the abstractions—time, grief, sorrow, the "holy spirit of man"—"home-keeping days and household reverences," compassion and pity, gates "barred with groanings manifold." Nothing that moves the eye

or the heart of men, but finds a place. And yet all is made into music and ends in music. The poet is the master, not his characters: thus he will make Atalanta speak of the flash of her own "swift white feet," and Althæa describe herself and her brother as infants "flowerwise feeding as the feeding bees" at their mother's breast. This comparison, if at all permissible, should have been made by the poet who might be supposed to have witnessed it, not by the woman who could not. So it will be objected. But what would have been a flaw in another drama is not one in *Atalanta*, where what was necessary was to do nothing inharmonious with the loveliness of the title, *Atalanta in Calydon*. There is nothing inharmonious. So, too, with the style; alliteration that could have made another ludicrous is in this only a fit portion of the echoing balance of the whole. Hardly before, perhaps, except in lyrics, or in narratives like The Eve of St. Agnes, had words been so self-contained, so much an end in themselves, so little fettered to what they could suggest but not express. The words are everything: all that life of heroes and passionate women, seas and winds, has been subdued to the colour of the words and the music of their cadence. Where the words cannot be everything, where two characters interchange brief speeches that

allow no lyrical development, they deserve the parody of Lowell:

CHORUS: Foolish who bites off nose, his face to spite.
OUTIS: Who fears his fate, him Fate shall one day spurn.
CHORUS: The Gods themselves are pliable to Fate.
OUTIS: The strong self-ruler dreads no other sway.
CHORUS: Sometimes the shortest way goes most about.
OUTIS: A shepherd once, I know that stars may set.
CHORUS: Why fetch a compass, having stars within?
OUTIS: That thou led'st sheep fits not for leading men.
CHORUS: To sleep-sealed eyes the wolf-dog barks in vain.

The play cannot be abridged or divided without complete destruction. There are few separable phrases or passages in it that are not far more beautiful in their places, because the key to them is only to be found in the play, not in the human breast. The whole should be read, or heard, at a sitting, for the first time at least. Pause, to let in the light of every day, and it may seem as it did to Browning, "a fuzz of words." It is very nicely balanced above folly. It is one-sided and makes but a single appeal. It can suffer by the intrusion of the world, the sound of men talking or nightingales singing. For it does not appeal to us as men knowing aught of men or nightingales: experience can add nothing to it,

or take away anything; and to-day it cannot be seriously blamed for a chorus which, as Tennyson said, abused the deity in the style of the Hebrew prophets. The words in it have no rich inheritance from old usage of speech or poetry, even when they are poetic or archaic or Biblical. They have little variety of tone, being for the most part majestically mournful, and never suddenly changing tone. Variety is given chiefly by the metre, and the differences of that are almost numberless. The blank verse changes and does everything save speak. As to the lyric verse it is of many forms, and each is so clear cut and so masterful to words without show of tyranny that a man might suppose any words would do as well and would maintain the same joy of metre. Hardly do we notice in the sweetness of it an un-English phrase like "imminence of wings" or "the innumerable lily," after the opening:

> O that I now, I too were
> By deep wells and water-floods. . . .

Again and again it tempts us to recall the opinion that the words are everything, and say that they are nothing; certainly it matters little what exactly is meant by "bodies of things to be in the houses of death and of birth." It is sufficient that the words never

impede the music, and often colour it with something noble, or delicate, or pathetic, that the "rhythm," as Burne-Jones said, "goes on with such a rush that it is enough to carry the world away." Swinburne could make even a line of monosyllables swift and leaping by using in the unaccented places negligible words, like "and," "of," and "the," which are almost silent. Tennyson wrote to the poet telling him that he envied him his wonderful rhythmical invention. Tennyson's own had always been carefully experimental and subordinate; in *Atalanta* rhythm was paramount, in rule sole and undivided.

II

PREPARATIONS

SWINBURNE was twenty-seven years old in 1864, yet he had been before the public already sixteen years. The reader of Fraser's Magazine in April, 1848—the year after Tennyson's The Princess—might have seen some verses entitled "The Warning" put into the mouth of a minstrel singing to the nobles and far-descended gentlemen of England, to this purpose:

Then don't despise the working man, he's strong and honest too,
And he would rather governed be than seek to govern you;
But lack of proper guidance at last may make him mad,
And when the best don't govern him, he'll call upon the bad;
From whence will come confusion and terrible turmoil,
And all because the lawmakers, the owners of the soil,
Will hear no word of warning meant, will take no step in time,
Before the groaning millions burst from sorrow into crime.

These verses, signed A. C. S., were dated from the Carlton Club. What the effect of the

warning was in 1848 it is now hard to say, but certain it is there was still need, in January, 1851, of a further address, and in the same magazine. "Ye landlords rich," cried the poet:

> Ye landlords rich! lay it well to heart,
> There is peril for all at hand,
> For the peasant has got too mean a part
> Of wealth in his native land.
> With a scornful eye and a heedless mien,
> And a mantle of furs so thick,
> How little ye dream of the fearful care
> When the labourer's wife is sick.
> How little ye dream, etc. . . .

This was from the same hand. An equally solemn but less altruistic poem, in October, 1849, had informed the readers of Fraser's Magazine that the poet had heard a spirit singing "as from a distant sphere," in the following words:

> "And oh! my child, be heedful that you wander not in sin,
> For your sorrow will be the greater, the more you venture in;
> And the sorrows of the essence, when it leaves its fleshly cell,
> Are deeper than the angels to mortality may tell."
> At the silent hour of midnight thus my mother sang to me,
> And I felt that she was near; though her form I could not see.

He had sung, too, of "Fate that rules us here with adamantine wand," and of how—

> A peace that is based on duty,
> The will and the power to think,
> Can carry, unscathed in beauty,
> The brave where the feeble sink. . . .

Little need was there to tell the world that the poet had "learnt in suffering what he taught in song":

> Hark! how the poet sings
> Whom grief is wearing;
> Like as the flower springs
> Into full bearing.
>
> Where amid old decay
> Fine skill has laid it;
> Even so the poet's lay—
> His woes have made it.

This was said in April, 1849. But he had consolations. He published a poem in the same magazine side by side with Kingsley's Yeast, in August, 1848, on Chopin's playing, and stanzas addressed to a "wild floating symphony" in March, 1849. A month before had appeared this "catch":

> Near the moon a pale star clinging
> Harbingers another morn,
> Feeble spark to mortals bringing
> Hopes and cares with daylight born.

PREPARATIONS

Fare thee well, thou moon of sadness!
Silent night, awhile farewell!
Will the day give grief or gladness?
Who of Adam's race can tell?

Fare thee well, thou moon of beauty!
Hail, thou glorious rising sun!
Let the weak be strong in duty,
Till their course, like thine, be run.

He could write playfully of love as in "Under the Rose," but his preference was rather for the dignified reflection that marked his last contribution, in June, 1851, "A Summer Thought":

Upon that tree wave not two leaves alike,
Yet are they all oak leaves, and all derive
From the same source, by the same means, their food.
Each hath its voice, yet when the mighty wind
Sweeps o'er them as a lyre, one song is theirs,
One hymn of praise, to the Great Lord of All.
When shall we be like them—when understand
That if we grow upon the topmost bough
Of the great tree,—or be so lowly placed
That we must touch the daisy at its foot,
One origin is ours, one aim, one work,
One God to bless, one tie of love to bind.

This poem was sufficient to prove that the author was not "lowly placed." The reader might also have concluded that he was twenty-three, that he had soon afterwards fallen in love with a lady sharing his admiration for In

Memoriam, and had married and rested content and graceful

> Upon the topmost bough
> Of the great tree.

Algernon Charles Swinburne, in fact, was born on April 5th, 1837, in Chapel Street, Belgravia, the only son of Admiral Charles Henry Swinburne and his wife Lady Jane Henrietta, daughter of the third earl of Ashburnham. What he meant by telling the exiled Hugo that he was "born of exiles" I do not know. From his father he had the blood of a feudal border family, "which as long ago as Edward II had produced a man of mark in Sir Adam de Swinburne," says Mr. Edmund Gosse in the Contemporary Review; from his mother, the blood of a loyal groom of the bedchamber to Charles I. The child was not long in Belgravia. His grandfather, Sir John Edward Swinburne, baronet, had a house at Capheaton, in Northumberland, where the family used to spend half the year. His father bought East Dene, in the Isle of Wight, between Ventnor and Niton, and this house the grandfather shared with him for the other half-year. Close to East Dene, at The Orchard, lived other relations, whose kindness the poet was afterwards to recall in dedicating *The Sisters* to his aunt,

the Lady Mary Gordon. Here and in Northumberland he had, as he always remembered and repeated in his poetry,

> The sun to sport in and the cliffs to scale,
> The sea to clasp and wrestle with. . . .

Such joys, he said, "even now make child and boy and man seem one." Tennyson did not come to the Isle of Wight until 1853, but Swinburne preferred to think, and certainly to write, about Northumberland. That tale of Balen and Balan, "two brethren of Northumberland," gave him an excuse for recalling his own pleasures in describing Balen's:

> The joy that lives at heart and home,
> The joy to rest, the joy to roam,
> The joy of crags and scaurs he clomb,
> The rapture of the encountering foam
> Embraced and breasted of the boy,
> The first good steed his knees bestrode,
> The first wild sound of songs that flowed
> Through ears that thrilled and heart that glowed,
> Fulfilled his death with joy.

Swinburne thought of himself as "a northern child of earth and sea." In *Tristram of Lyonesse* he rejoiced to have Tristram and Iseult at Joyous Gard, because that castle might be supposed Northumbrian and he could mingle the hero with himself and the castle with his own home—

> The great round girth of goodly wall that showed
> Where for one clear sweet season's length should be
> Their place of strength to rest in, fain and free,
> By the utmost margin of the loud lone sea.

The poet shared his heroine, Mary Stuart's longing, when she cried: "O that I were now in saddle!" He shared with her, too, her preference of the moors, where "the wind and sun make madder mirth by midsummer," to the smoother south. Reginald in *The Sisters* makes the same comparison, saying that even without the streams the north would be sweeter, that even with the northern streams the south could not "match our borders." The youthful Swinburne bound together the pleasures of riding, the moor and the sea, in days which he afterwards revived for the dedication of his third series of *Poems and Ballads:*

> Days when I rode by moors and streams,
> Reining my rhymes into buoyant order.

He was a fearless rider, a fearless climber. He climbed Culver Cliff in the Isle of Wight at a great risk, to prove his nerve, and his picture in *Tristram* of the birds "on some straight rocks' ledge,"

> Still as fair shapes fixed on some wondrous wall
> Of minster aisle or cloister-close or hall . . .

might be a memory gained from such a climb.

Riding and climbing were good, and very good, but swimming was best of all. The north might be better than the south: the sea was always the sea. In after years he wrote many poems about the sea and hardly one without it. The sea and not the earth, he said, was his mother. Sometimes he coupled with it the wind, hailing them, as in *The Garden of Cymodoce:*

> Sea, and bright wind, and heaven of ardent air,
> More dear than all things earth-born; O to me
> Mother more dear than love's own longing, sea,
> More than love's eyes are, fair. . . .

Sometimes he worshipped the sun, "O sun that we see to be God"; but it was in the sea that he did so. For a beautiful or a terrible comparison he had usually to go to the sea, and having gone there seemed to forget, certainly made others forget, why he had gone: as when, for example, he says that Blake's verse "pauses and musters, and falls always as a wave does, with the same patience of gathering form, and rounded glory of springing curve, and sharp, sweet flash of dishevelled and flickering foam as it curls over, showing the sun through its soft heaving side in veins of gold that inscribe and jewels of green that inlay the quivering and sundering skirt or veil of thinner water, throw-

ing upon the tremulous space of narrowing sea in front, like a reflection of lifted and vibrating hair, the windy shadow of its shaken spray."

A fanciful critic has put down the faulty lengthiness of Swinburne's poems to a "sea-obsession," saying that "his major forces and his high creative impulse have, since *Mary Stuart*, been mainly devoted to the splendidly impossible feat of providing continual lyrical change for the most monotonous theme in existence." His Tristram shared his delight, leaping towards the sea's breast with a cry of love "as toward a mother's where his head might rest"; his *Marino Faliero* at the last hour desired—"perchance but a boy's wish"—to "set sail and die at sea." As a boy the poet earned the name of Seagull, which he seems to recall in the poem *To a Sea-mew*—

> When I had wings, my brother,
> Such wings were mine as thine . . .

This was in 1886; yet he ended:

> Ah, well were I for ever,
> Would'st thou change lives with me.

When he was a sea-gull he was writing those serious poems in Fraser's Magazine. Reading became a pleasure to him not unworthy to be ranked with swimming and riding. He had

Matthew Arnold's Strayed Reveller, Forsaken Merman, and even the New Sirens by heart, when he was "just ignorant of teens": Empedocles, and especially the songs of Callicles, he knew as a schoolboy. His debts to Tennyson, as he told the poet in acknowledging his praise of *Atalanta*, had begun to accumulate in his twelfth year. In his book on Shakespeare he said that, from "well-nigh the first years" he could remember, he had "made of the study of Shakespeare the chief spiritual delight" of his life. Probably he was one of those to whose "innocent infantine perceptions the first obscure electric revelation of what Blake calls the 'Eternal Female' was given through a blind wondering thrill of childish rapture by a lightning on the baby dawn of their senses and their soul from the sunrise of Shakespeare's Cleopatra." At home he was given the privilege of reading at meals. What he very much liked, indoors or out of doors, he would read aloud or recite: a cousin remembers him reciting "the Victorian poets" and Lays of Ancient Rome. To his heroes he could be a valet, and was doubtless "thankful for having over our heads somewhere in the world" heroes like "Victor Hugo or Miss Cherbury the actress, Tennyson or a fellow who rode in the Balaclava charge," as he says in *Love's Cross-Currents*. "The delight of feeling small

and giving in" at the sight of the hero was one which he never lost, but it may have been encouraged and defined by Carlyle's Heroes. For Carlyle he did admire at first. Dickens he admired from first to last, reading Bleak House in its serial form while he was at Eton.

Except in cases of physical disobedience probably the only curb to his freedom was the tradition of his class. But it is said that his mother asked him not to read Byron till he was twenty-one: if he literally obeyed her, as is said, he gave a fresh proof that the like prohibitions are powerless except as direct incentives to disobey the spirit. The religion of his family was presumably that of his class; it either produced or could not prevent an atheism like Shelley's, but it encouraged a study of the Bible which afterwards served him in helping Jowett to make a selection for the reading of children, and to draw from his collaborator a cordial compliment on his "thorough familiarity with sundry parts of the sacred text." It left him, as it helped to make him, such that one who knew him all through his life said: "I never met with a character more thoroughly loyal, chivalrous and—though some of his utterances may seem to contradict it—reverent-minded. His reverence for the aged and for parents, women and little children was unlike any other

man's that I ever knew." "For such an one" as Othello, he wrote afterwards, "even a boy may well think how thankfully and joyfully he would lay down his life": such a boy it seems was Swinburne himself. Until his life is written we can know little more of his home days, except that they left him free to enjoy Nature and literature to the uttermost, and kept in him to the last a happy and passionate memory of his childhood and a fond if independent regard for those who shared it, father and mother, aunt, cousin and sisters. Admiral Swinburne being a sailor, the poet could magnify him and at his death speak of him—but ambiguously—as crossing "the last of many an unsailed sea": in *A Study of Victor Hugo* he records with "filial vanity or egotism" his father's friendship in youth with Admiral Canaris, to whom Victor Hugo addressed "two glorious poems." While he was writing *Charlotte Brontë*, not long before the death of his father, he could not but use as an illustration the landscape by Crome hanging in the house where he worked, which he had known all through the years he could remember.

Five years at Eton would appear not to have interrupted or much aided his development, unless they helped to make him a scholar. Since he had been until then a home-bred boy, and was neither an athlete nor an ordinary

amusing person, it is possible that he enjoyed his schooldays chiefly in retrospect. Whether or not, he was hard pressed for matter when he came, in 1891, to write "*Eton: An Ode for the Four Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the College*"; he had to drag in Shelley, to remark that the reaches of the river still shine, and to suggest that in another four hundred and fifty years "haply here shall Eton's record be what England finds it yet." But he was a good enough Etonian to rejoice, after copying out some mistaken Greek of Shelley's, that "Shelley was clear of Eton when he committed this verse." Swinburne himself mastered and obeyed Greek scholarship to admiration. He delighted in language. Once at Eton he offered for an exercise a set of verses in Galliambics, the metre of Tennyson's Boadicea, with tragic consequences, for they were rejected by the master as "no metre at all." The young versifier and lover of poetry was not to be discouraged by a schoolmaster: he was more likely to be impressed by his first meeting with a poet in his early school days, for though the poet was only Rogers he showed "gracious and cordial kindness" to the "small Etonian."

But he had already met in the spirit "the spiritual sovereign of the nineteenth century"—"greater than all other poets of his time to-

gether"—"the greatest man since Shakespeare" —Victor Hugo, his lord and master. He was afterwards to speak of himself as one of those who from childhood had fostered and fortified whatever of good was born in them—"all capacity of spiritual work, all seed of human sympathy, all powers of hope and faith, all passions and aspirations found loyal to the service of duty and love"—with "the bread of his deathless word and the wine" of Hugo's immortal song. He was to recall how often he had chanted or shouted or otherwise declaimed Hugo's Gastibelza on horseback or in the sea in holiday time:

Gastibelza, l'homme à la carabine
Chantait ainsi :
Quelqu'un a-t-il connu dõna Sabine ?
Quelqu'un d'ici ?
Dansez, chantez, villageois ! la nuit gagne
Le mont Falou.
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

He recalled how its beauty had "reduced his own ambition to a sort of rapturous and adoring despair," and gave him a new delight in the sense that "there is always Victor Hugo, living or dead, to look up to and bow down to." He had still further to recall the "paternal goodness" of Hugo in vouchsafing to take notice of

one of his early "crude and puerile" attempts "to render some tribute of thanks for the gifts of his genius." He was to use first of all as a comparison for Hugo one of the sublimest scenes of his life, a night scene in the Channel, of forked and sheet lightning, of moonlight and phosphoric fire on the waters together—"Artemis watching with a serene splendour of scorn the battle of Titans and the revel of nymphs, from her stainless and Olympian summit of divine indifferent light." This was the *Channel Passage* of 1855 which gave the title and a subject to Swinburne's last book of poems. The scene was used a third time in *A Study of Shakespeare*, because he could not forbear saying that "the painter of the storm in Pericles must have shared the adventure and relished the rapture of such an hour." Except that he was sailing from Ostend, I know nothing of the travel which this crossing concluded. Probably it was during the period between Eton and Oxford, when Swinburne was either abroad or under the tutorship of the distinguished "ruminant" Stubbs, afterwards Bishop of Oxford, and then Vicar of Navestock in Essex, where the boy sometimes resided with him.

In 1857 Swinburne entered Balliol College, Oxford, as a Commoner. Pater, at Brasenose, who was two years younger, was thus almost his

exact contemporary. William Morris had just taken his degree. Jowett, nearly twenty years after his election to a Fellowship at Balliol, had lately become Regius Professor of Greek, only to pay for his religious liberalism, at the sentence of the University, with the emoluments of his office during ten years. He became a friend of Swinburne's, travelled in England with him, and was a guest at his father's house.

Swinburne apparently did not become quite friendly to the University, though he remained sufficiently Oxonian to enjoy a laugh at "certain wise men of the east of England—Cantabrigian Magi." In spite of his scholarship, he was placed only in the second class in classical Moderations, earned no classical prizes, and never took a degree; but in 1858 he had the Taylorian prize for French and Italian. It is clear that he was a very great reader, especially of poetry; even twenty years later he could not really feel that prose could be as good as verse, and he wrote of the spring of 1616 as "the darkest that ever dawned upon England or the world" because it killed Shakespeare. All young or bold writers had his heart, whether they were lofty like Æschylus and Dante and Milton, sweet like Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Coleridge, Musset and Tennyson, or sweet and lofty like Shelley and Marlowe. After Shakespeare and

Hugo, he most loved Shelley and Marlowe, most venerated Landor. He chose, above all, poetry that was in some way adventurous, aspiring even to giddiness, free and yet exquisite: whence he could never fully admire Spenser or Keats, Byron or Whitman. As an older man he turned round on Musset, but as a youth the poem where the Frenchman "whimpered like a whipped hound over the cruel work of men who shook the Cross and took away the Saviour" seemed a genuine product of sincere and tender inspiration, though he could not look back to that period without "an inward smile." New English poetry by itself—not to speak of the personalities of the two living poets then in Oxford, his friends Rossetti and William Morris—was enough to produce his "profound inattention to lectures on Aldrich's Logic." Tennyson's finest short poems had appeared: Maud was new and unpopular, but admired by Swinburne. Browning was known by his Pauline, Bells and Pomegranates, Sordello, and the plays; Arnold by his Strayed Reveller, Empedocles, and Scholar-Gypsy. Morris's Defence of Guenevere belonged to 1858. In France Victor Hugo's Châtiments, Contemplations, and Légende Des Siècles, Gautier's Émaux et Camées, were new. Musset and Béranger were just dead (1857): Catullus and Marlowe and Shelley were

in their freshest youth. These were days probably when he would have exclaimed with Musset:

> Grèce, ô mère des arts, terre d'idolâtrie
> De mes veux insensés éternelle patrie,
> J'étais né pour ces temps où les fleurs de ton front
> Couronnaient dans les mers l'azur de l'Hellespont.
> Je suis un citoyen de tes siècles antiques; . . .

The conscious Pagan of France emphasized the lesson of Greece; with Théophile Gautier he learned to rebuke the monk for anathematising the body, "votre corps, modelé par le doigt de Dieu même, que Jesus-Christ, son fils, a daigné revêtir":

> L'esprit est immortel, on ne peut le nier;
> Mais dire, comme vous, que la chair est infâme,
> Statuaire divine, c'est te calomnier.

Swinburne was never to calumniate the divine sculptor in his capacity of sculptor. Gautier no doubt helped him to be one of those who must thrust their hands into the side of beauty, who love above all whatsoever beautiful things are hard and clear and bright, whatsoever are to be seen with the eye and touched with lips and hands. He chose the company of the young, the glad and the lovely.

In his first year at Oxford he began writing and publishing. The "Undergraduate Papers"

of 1857 and 1858 contain both verse and prose by Swinburne. Writing on the dramatists Marlowe and Webster, he expressed his preference for strong, fresh minds "from which the stamp of a stern and glorious age was not yet outworn," to those who, like Beaumont and Fletcher, "mix with the very sources of poetry that faint false sweetness which enervates the mind and clogs the taste of the reader." He praised the "rapid rhythm and gorgeous luxuries of Hero and Leander," and the poet who "did justice once for all to that much misused and belied thing, the purely sensuous and outward side of love." He read with delight Leander's reply to Hero, the sacred nun of Venus:

> The rites
> In which Love's beauteous Empress most delights,
> Are banquets, Doric music, midnight revel,
> Plays, masks, and all that stern age counteth evil.
> Thee as a holy idiot doth she scorn,
> For thou in vowing chastity hast sworn
> To rob her name and honour, and thereby
> Commit'st a sin far worse than perjury,
> Even sacrilege against her Deity,
> Through regular and formal purity:
> To expiate which sin, kiss and shake hands,
> Such sacrifice as this Venus demands.

He believed that "wise enjoyment, noble and healthy teaching, lies for all in the forgotten

writings of the early masters," and concluded with some original verses:

> Honour them now (ends my allocution)
> Not confer your degree when the folks leave college.

His poem, *Queen Yscult*, in the same number of "Undergraduate Papers," shows the influence of Morris's as yet unpublished early poems, both in style and subject. Tennyson's Idylls did not appear until 1859. The poem opens with the death of Tristram's mother, Blancheflour:

> There men found her as they sped
> Very beautiful and dead,
> In the lilies white and red.
>
> And beside her lying there,
> Found a manchild strong and fair
> Lain among the lilies bare. . . .
>
> And for the sweet look he had,
> Weeping not but very sad,
> Tristram by his name they bade.

The first and only Canto ends with Tristram's embassage to fetch Yseult:

> Spake the King so lean and cold,
> "She hath name of honour old,
> Yseult queen, the hair of gold.
>
> All her limbs are fair and strong,
> All her face is straight and long,
> And her talk is as a song.
>
> And faint lines of colour stripe
> (As spilt wine that one should wipe)
> All her golden hair cornripe.

Drawn like red gold ears that stand
In the yellow summer land;
Arrow-straight her perfect hand.

And her eyes like river-lakes
Where a gloomy glory shakes
Which the happy sunset makes.

Her shall Tristram go to bring,
With a gift of some rich thing
Fit to free a prisoned King."

As Sir Mark said, it was done;
And ere set the morrow's sun,
Tristram the good knight was gone.

Forth to Ireland bade he come,
Forth across the grey sea foam,
All to bring Queen Yseult home.

The next number proved that Swinburne had not surrendered the "merry madness" of youth to write *Queen Yseult*, for it contained a review of the imaginary "Monomaniac's Tragedy and Other Poems of Ernest Wheldrake, author of Eve: A Mystery." "Eve," says the reviewer, "was anatomized 'with a bitter and severe delight' by all the critics who noticed it with the exception (we believe) of Mr. Wheldrake himself." He quotes short passages to show Belial blaspheming and dwelling on "unbecoming topics," like "wine-dishevelled tresses," "globed sapphires of liquescent eyes, warmed with prenatal influx of rich love," "luscious sweetnesses of vin-

tage-tinctured raiment." The hero of the "Monomaniac's Tragedy," who is engaged in writing "Iscariot: A Tragedy," has broken into his brother's house and wrung a nephew's neck in order to gain experience of the feelings of thieves and murderers. It cannot be complained that the fun is long drawn out, when the same short review gives as a specimen of Wheldrake's writing a poem on Louis Napoleon which Swinburne trusts will atone in imperial circles for Hugo's Châtiments:

> He stands upon a rock that cleaves the sheath
> Of blue sea like a sword of upward foam;
> Along the washing waste flows far beneath
> A palpitation of senescent storm.
> He, the Lethean pilot of grim death,
> Utters by fits a very potent breath.
> He is the apex of the focussed ages,
> The crown of all those labouring powers that warm
> Earth's red hot core, when scoriac sorrow rages.
> He is the breath Titanic—the supreme
> Development of some presolar dream.
> Owls, dogs, that bellow at him! is he not
> More strong than ye? His intermittent love
> The measure of your wretched hate keeps hot.
> Ye are below him—for he is above.

At least this "review" seems to foretell Swinburne's own poems on "unbecoming topics," the malicious hoaxing irony of his replies to Robert Buchanan's pseudonymous attack, his much furious and scornful abuse of Napoleon the Little.

Swinburne had gone up to Oxford with a very complete Republicanism founded on the words of Plutarch and Milton, Shelley, Landor, and Mazzini ; and Orsini's attempt on Louis Napoleon is said to have moved him to uphold "the virtue of tyrannicide" in public. He has recorded how as a freshman in the fifth or sixth year of Louis Napoleon's "empire of cutpurses and cut-throats" he had been smiled on tolerantly by his elders for believing in "the principles and teaching of men who ventured to believe in the realization of Italian unity." The Society of the Friends of Italy had just been reconstituted, and Walter Savage Landor was one of them. England was disturbed, chiefly through the agitation of Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Kossuth, by a considerable feeling for Italian unity, against Austria; but, like Swinburne's Oxford audience, Carlyle was impatient with Mazzini's "Republicanism," his "Progress," and other "Rousseau fanaticisms." To Swinburne the movement for Italian unity was like the movements celebrated by Shelley in the Ode to Liberty, the Ode to Naples, and Hellas. Phrases like Mazzini's "God and the People," "God, the People, Love and Liberty," the grand style of his summons "to a task like the tasks of God, the creation of a people," his vision of the future and "the people rising in its majesty, brothers

in one faith, one bond of equality and love, one ideal of citizen virtue that ever grows in beauty and might," his clear cry that "there can be no moderation between good and evil, truth and error, progress and reaction"—these words came to unite in Swinburne's heart with Shelley's:

> And thou, lost Paradise of this divine
> And glorious world! thou flowery wilderness!
> Thou island of eternity! thou shrine
> Where Desolation, clothed with loveliness,
> Worships the thing thou wert! O Italy,
> Gather thy blood into thy heart; repress
> The beasts who make their dens thy sacred palaces.

Swinburne could spend his fieriest intellectual emotions on the Italian *risorgimento* without throwing them away. Enthusiasm for a genuine social movement never yet failed to be repaid, if only with increase of enthusiasm; to Swinburne it gave a material that could arouse and match his swiftest and lordliest measures. After his visit to Italy in 1864 he called her "my second mother country."

His first book, published in the year of his leaving Oxford, 1860, had, however, little enough of liberty and republicanism. It consisted of two plays—one, *The Queen Mother*, ending in the Massacre of Bartholomew, and having for its characters Catherine de Medici, Charles IX of France, Henry of Navarre, Catholic and Huguenot nobles, and certain maids-of-honour;

the other, *Rosamond*, depicting the last days of the love between Henry II of England and fair Rosamond. Both are distinguished and marred by a too curious Elizabethanism of style, as where King Charles says in *The Queen Mother:*

> Or now, this gold that makes me up a king,
> This apprehensive note and mark of time,
> This token'd kingdom, this well-tested worth,
> Wherein my brows exult and are begirt
> With the brave sum and sense of kingliness,
> To have this melted from a narrow head
> Or broken on the bare disfeatured brows,
> And marr'd i' the very feature and fair place
> Where it looked nobly—were this no shame to us?

Sometimes the copy is admirable, sometimes obscure. Browning was a better influence, leading the young poet to lines like those spoken by Rosamond:

> Who calls it spring?
> Simply this winter plays at red and green.
> Clean white no colour for me, did they say?
> I never loved white roses much; but see
> How the wind drenches the low lime-branches
> With shaken silver in the rainiest leaves.
> Mere winter, winter.

He adopts even the Browningesque "suppose you," in a passage where he takes leave to use almost more than the most Elizabethan licence with lines like:

> Lost me my soul with a mask, a most ungracious one.

He showed the influence of Rossetti in the endings of several such lines as—

> Painted with colours for his ease-taking.

Both plays have songs, *The Queen Mother* in French, *Rosamond* in archaic English. Thus early was Swinburne an excellent verse-master outside his own tongue.

The Queen Mother holds the attention chiefly through the character of Denise, the maid of honour, Charles's mistress, who tries to persuade the king against the massacre, and at last goes out in her madness into the bloody streets and is killed. There are careful touches of character on many pages, as where Catherine says in the midst of the massacre:

> I am hot only in the palm of the hands.
> Do you not think, sir, some of these dead men,
> Being children, dreamed perhaps of this?

But the play is more noticeable for the sympathetic treatment of the amorousness and bloodthirstiness of a palace which, he said at a later date, in the Appendix to *Mary Stuart*, "it would be flattery to call a brothel or a slaughter-house," for "its virtues were homicide and adultery." Denise is "a white long woman with thick hair"; and "not the lightest thing she has that hair," says Margaret Valois. To Marshal Tavannes the girl is "a costly piece

of white." She tells the King that she could kill him "here between the eyes," rather than lose his face to touch and his hair to twist curls in: she reminds him of how he bit her above the shoulder. During the massacre "twenty with sweet laughing mouths" gathered about a corpse to abuse it with "fleers and gibes" that made the murderer merry. "Their blood," says a noble:

> Their blood is apt to heats so mutable
> As in their softer bodies overgrow
> The temper of sweet reason, and confound
> All order but their blood.

Yolande, with an old man's brain "in her most supple body," is one, thinks Catherine, who will not "wry her mouth on tasting blood." Charles practised as a boy to "pinch out life by nips in some sick beast," likes the smell of a man's blood: "it stings and makes one weep." Denise alone is pitiful, telling her lover that the body of the worst man is compounded of love and pain, like himself, and "was worth God's time to finish."

Rosamond is far less a play. In *The Queen Mother* Catherine talks about herself and the mouth which "has been a gracious thing for kisses to fall near": in *Rosamond* the best passages are where Rosamond describes herself, or where Henry or Eleanor describes Rosamond

to her face. Rosamond, indeed, sees herself already as the legendary beauty; she speaks of herself as having been in turn Helen, Cressida, Guenevere; before the King comes she says she will sleep, in order to have "the sweet of sleep" on her face "to touch his senses with." The result is a languid, luxurious, impression of the "fair fool with her soft shameful mouth," and the reader agrees with Bouchard that "being fair, a woman is worth pains to see." As Rosamond is amorous and gentle, the Queen is amorous and cruel, loving well to feel pain and to inflict it on the shrinking hated mistress. Cruelty and amorousness are mixed also in the boy Arthur's story, how he thrust himself through the lattice to see a woman with a white, smooth neck and wonderful red mouth, and how the thought of her made him shake in sleep; but his master Hugh beat him for it with a switch like a beehive let loose—he could touch separately the twelve prints of "the sharp, small suckers." Perhaps Swinburne had become interested in the birch at Eton: that he was interested is quite clear from the frequent mention of it in *Love's Cross Currents*, where the boy Reginald—afterwards a writer of verse very much like Swinburne's—"relished the subject of flagellation as few men relish rare wine."

The effect of *Rosamond* is more like that of such a narrative as The Eve of St. Agnes than of a play. It is stuffed with the pleasantness and pitifulness of love among people who seem to have nothing to do but to love, unless it be to hate. But it is love, too, which the lovers know as sin, though Rosamond regards her beauty as "part of the perfect witness of the world, how good it is."

> I that have held a land between twin lips
> And turned large England to a little kiss;
> God thinks not of me as contemptible.

The poet who made her thought not of her as contemptible, for evidently he was one of love's lovers, loving it for its own sake and because it gives the keenest relish to all things in Nature and men and women. The book is rich enough in the luxury of love to stop any complaint against the form of drama, but it can hardly have foretold dramatic success. It is a choice exercise in English, French, and Latin, for those that can enjoy such. For the rest, it seldom misses the sweetness of the song of Constance:

> Sweet, for God's love I bid you kiss right close
> On mouth and cheek, because you see my rose
> Has died that got no kisses of the rain;
> So will I sing to sweeten my sweet mouth,
> So will I braid my thickest hair to smooth,
> And then—I need not call you love again.

The blank verse goes on and on with little purpose but gathering sweets, and the rewards of the gathering are undeniable. They were extraordinary in a man of twenty-two or twenty-three.

The performance might surprise any but the poet's friends. Among them his reputation as a poet and a brilliant uncontrolled human being was exceptional. He had become so worshipping a disciple of Dante Rossetti that Burne-Jones said: "Now we were four in company, not three," Morris being the other. "Courteous, affectionate, and unsuspicious," he was "faithful beyond most people to those he really loved." Thus was deepened his "lifelong delight in the forces of an art which is not my own, quickened by the intercourse of many years with eminent artists. . . ." He continually saw these men, going even three times a day to Burne-Jones and often taking poems to repeat. He was a noticeable small man with a "glorious abundance" of "fiery" or "reddish yellow" or "orange" hair and "blue-grey" or "clear green" eyes softened by thick brown lashes. While he was repeating poetry his eyes were lifted in a "rapt unconscious gaze," his head hung on one side, his body shook, his high-pitched voice expressed the utmost fervour and excitement, and "in the concentrated emphasis of his slow utterance he achieved something like a Delphic ecstasy, the

transfiguration of the Pythia quivering on her tripod." The halo of hair was sometimes "gravely or waggishly" waved at the company. He might also "jump about the room in a manner somewhat embarrassing to the listener." He was always restless, never standing still; his walk was turned into a dance; even sitting, he moved his wrists, perhaps his feet also, as if he were keeping time with some "inner rhythm of excitement." Reciting or not, he was continually subject to a "violent elevation of spirits," yet "the extraordinary spasmodic action" accompanying his paroxysms of excitement seemed to produce no fatigue, but changed into a "graceful and smiling calm . . . his eyes fixed in a sort of trance, and only his lips shifting and shivering a little, without a sound."

His conversation, rapid and yet not voluble, was "very splendid in quality," always vigorous, often violent and often biting, but always sparing an absent friend. It was made the more remarkable by his memory. When Rossetti buried his poems with his wife (1862), Swinburne's memory kept many of them alive. In an account of an evening at Fryston with Lord Houghton it has been recorded how the young poet, the only unknown in the party, made an impression:

He was silent till the middle of dinner, when somebody raised a literary question, touching Sophocles or Shakespeare. Then he began; and from his first words his hearers knew they had to do with a master. Host and guests played up to him, and he held them spellbound. "We dined, we smoked, he talked, and we were enthralled," says, in effect, the writer; and at midnight I remember we all adjourned to my room, where we sat about on chairs or on the bed listening while this amazing young poet poured out page after page of the Elizabethans and page after page of his own unpublished verse till two in the morning.

To one who was not overwhelmed by him he appeared "short, with shoulders that sloped more than a woman's, from which rose a long," but not (it is also said) a "slender neck, surmounted by an enormous head" with too small a chin. "The cranium was out of all proportion to the rest of the structure. His spine was rigid, and though he often bowed the heaviness of his head, *lasso papavera collo*, he never seemed to bend his back. Except in consequence of a certain physical weakness"—presumably one of those "follies of Bohemianism" which are "dangerous to health and life"—"which probably may, in more philosophical days, come to be accounted for and palliated—except when suffering from this external cause, he seemed immune from all the maladies that pursue mankind. He did not know fatigue;

his agility and brightness were almost mechanical. I never heard him complain of a headache or a toothache. He required very little sleep, and occasionally when I have parted from him in the evening after saying good night, he has simply sat back in the deep sofa in his sitting-room, his little feet close together, his arms against his side, folded in his frock-coat like a grasshopper in its wing-covers, and fallen asleep, apparently for the night, before I could blow out the candles and steal forth from the doors." Out of doors he was like "something blown before a wind," having the movements of a somnambulist. I seem to see him in Camber's description of his brother Locrine:

> My brother is a prince of paramours—
> Eyes coloured like the springtide sea and hair
> Bright as with fire of sundawn. . . .

In his circle he was already known by many of the poems afterwards printed in *Poems and Ballads;* for these, he said, in the dedication of 1865, came from seven years of his life.

> The youngest were born of boy's pastime,
> The eldest are young.

Several appeared in The Spectator in 1862, including *Faustine*, forty verses of *Faustine—tempora mutantur*—down to the last. During that winter he recited the *Laus Veneris* on the

sands of Tynemouth in the course of a visit to William Bell Scott, as he recited "When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces" on the road between Newport and Shorwell in the Isle of Wight. Like Rossetti he was writing *bouts-rimés* and Limericks. He was also experimenting in metre, and one Sunday morning, having looked at The Rhythm of Bernard de Morlaix and an English translation, he wrote twenty-six lines of "a projected version of Bernard's Rhythm," of which these are a specimen:

O land without guilt, strong city safe-built in a marvellous place,
I cling to thee, ache for thee, sing to thee, wake for thee, watch for thy face:
Full of cursing and strife are the days of my life; with their sins they are fed,
Out of sin is the root, unto sin is the fruit, in their sins they are dead.

He could turn aside, as he did in 1864, to write a *Morality*, the acting of which formed the chief part of *The Children of the Chapel*, a story by his cousin, now Mrs. Disney Leith. The whole story was composed and written under his eye. The morality, *The Pilgrim of Pleasure*, abounds in sweet characteristic verses, as where Youth speaks:

We have gone by many lands, and many grievous ways,
And yet have we not found this Pleasure all these days.
Sometimes a lightening all about her have we seen,
A glittering of her garments among the fieldes green;
Sometimes the waving of her hair that is right sweet,
A lifting of her eyelids, or a shining of her feet,
Or either in sleeping or in waking have we heard
A rustling of raiment or a whispering of a word,
Or a noise of pleasant water running over a waste place,
Yet have I not beheld her, nor known her very face.

He was thus already a master of those means, such as the frequent use of "a," "the," "of," "or," "in," and of participial nouns like "lightening," by which the language submitted itself to all his love of metre. The piece is purest Swinburne, nowhere more so than in the final triumph of Death:

Alas! your kingdom and lands! alas! your men and their might!
Alas the strength of your hands and the days of your vain delight!
Alas! the words that were spoken, sweet words on a pleasant tongue!
Alas! your harps that are broken, the harps that were carven and strung!
Alas! the light in your eyes, the gold in your golden hair!
Alas! your sayings wise, and the goodly things ye were!
Alas! your glory! alas! the sound of your names among men!

Behold it is come to pass, ye shall sleep and arise not again.
Dust shall fall on your face, and dust shall hang in your hair;
Ye shall sleep without shifting of place, and shall be no more as ye were;

Ye shall never open your mouth; ye shall never lift up your head;
Ye shall look not to north or to south; life is done; and behold you are dead!
With your hand ye shall not threat; with your throat ye shall not sing.
Ye, ye that are living yet, ye shall each be a grievous thing.
Ye shall each fare underground, ye shall lose both speech and breath;
Without sight ye shall see, without sound ye shall hear, and shall know I am Death.

The repetitions, the rhetorical and Biblical stateliness, the splendid farewells to what was splendid, are admirable enough, yet seem to reveal that the effort was an exercise and an experiment only. The archaic song of Vain Delight, in this form:

I am so noble a queen
I have a right little teen,
I were a goodly samite green,
Fresh flowers and red.

No man so sad there is
But if I will him kiss
With my good sweet lips, I wis,
He shall well be sped.

Whoso that will me see
He shall have great joy of me,
And merry man shall he be
Till he be dead—

this is as good as Swinburne always was at an old form or dialect or foreign tongue. The power to do it is the only originality shown.

He had already begun to write on Blake in 1863; "meanwhile some last word has to be said concerning Blake's life and death," he writes, still with something of Carlyle in his accent. This book, with its necessary accounts of pictures, encouraged Swinburne, if he had need of encouragement, in pictorial description. Many of his translations from pictures are as good as possible in a concentrated style, owing a good deal to Ruskin, which did not forbid Swinburne the rhythms, the language, or the alliteration of his verse, as for example in *William Blake:*

> Dante and Virgil, standing in a niche of rifted rock faced by another cliff up and down which a reptile crowd of spirits swarms and sinks, looking down on the grovelling and swine-like flocks of Malebolge; lying tumbled about the loathsome land in hateful heaps of leprous flesh and dishevelled deformity, with limbs contorted, clawing nails, and staring horror of hair and eyes: one figure thrown down in a corner of the crowded cliff-side, her form and face drowned in an overflow of ruined raining tresses.

One page in this book alone shows into what rhythms his thought ran when phrases like the following are easily to be found:

> "With limbs contorted, clawing nails, and staring horror of hair and eyes."
>
> "Amid heaving and glaring motion of vapour and fire."

"The dark hard strength and sweep of its sterile ridges."

"Washed about with surf and froth of tideless fire, and heavily laden with the lurid languor of hell."

His descriptions of Rossetti's and Burne-Jones' pictures in *Essays and Studies* could not fail to confirm the habit and to impress his mind still more deeply with Rossetti's women, such as Lilith:

"Clothed in soft white garments, she draws out through a comb the heavy mass of hair like thick spun gold to fullest length; her head leans back half sleepily, superb and satiate with its own beauty; [compare "Faustine"] the eyes are languid, without love in them or hate; the sweet luxurious mouth has the patience of pleasure fulfilled and complete, the warm repose of passion sure of its delight. . . . The sleepy splendour of the picture is a fit raiment for the idea incarnate of faultless fleshy beauty and peril of pleasure unavoidable."

"Peril of pleasure unavoidable" might have been the last line of a sonnet in Rossetti's manner. Swinburne must have known well Rossetti's poems on pictures: we know that he knew and admired that Song of the Bower which seems to point us back to Browning and on to Swinburne:

. . . Shall I not one day remember thy bower,
One day when all days are one to me?
Thinking "I stirred not, and yet had the power!"
Yearning, "Ah God, if again it might be!"

Peace, peace! such a small lamp illumes, on this high-
way,
So dimly so few steps in front of my feet,
Yet shows me that her way is parted from my way. . . .
Out of sight, beyond light, at what goal may we
meet?

If he needed incitement to a Biblical accent, he found it in the picture of "The Card Dealer," and something else which he absorbed and changed:

Whom plays she with? with thee, who lov'st
These gems upon her hand;
With me, who search her secret brows;
With all men, bless'd or bann'd.
We play together, she and we,
Within a vain strange land:

A land without any order,
Day even as night (one saith)
Where who lieth down ariseth not
Nor the sleeper awakeneth;
A land of darkness as darkness itself
And of the shadow of death.

What be her cards you ask? Even these:
The heart, that doth but crave
More, having fed; the diamond,
Skilled to make base seem brave;
The club, for smiting in the dark;
The spade, to dig a grave.

Though Morris was no painter, the influence of his poetry, the mingled violence and dreami-

ness of life in the land of his early poems, or, rather, that arras

> Where the wind set the silken kings asway

could not but second the influence of painting. The young poet might be expected to see living men and women

> Made sad by dew and wind, and tree-barred moon,

or

> In Avalon asleep,
> Among the poppies and the yellow flowers.

If "the ladies' names bite verily like steel," and massier things weigh more light in "that half sleep, half strife (strange sleep, strange strife) that men call living," yet sometimes might be heard a voice crying:

> When you catch his eyes through the helmit-slit,
> Swerve to the left, then out at his head,
> And the Lord God give you joy of it.

Swinburne's memory of Morris's early verses, or at least King Arthur's Tomb, enabled him to quote them in reviewing Jason, and he thought it would be safe to swear to his accuracy; "such verses are not forgettable," he said; he found in the figures presented by them "the blood and breath, the shape and step of life." In 1862 he published a story in the manner of Morris's early romances, *Dead Love*,

where a woman falls in love with the corpse of her husband's murderer, and brings it to life by her kissing, but is burnt along with it by the cousin who had brought her the corpse to gratify hate, not love.

Swinburne's training among artists taught him to say of a poem of Baudelaire: "Nothing can beat that as a piece of beautiful drawing." His review of Baudelaire's Fleurs du Mal is at least as interesting now for its indication of his own tastes and opinions. Taking occasion to remark that French critics seemed to have forgotten that "a poet's business is presumably to write good verses and by no means to redeem the age and remould society," he did not conceal the fact that in the greater part of the book Baudelaire "has chosen to dwell mainly upon sad and strange things—the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure—the perverse happiness and wayward sorrows of exceptional people. It has the languid lurid beauty of close and threatening weather—a heavy, heated temperature, with dangerous hot-house scents in it; thick shadow of cloud about it, and fire of molten light." Which is very much what Pater was afterwards to say of Morris's early poems. "It is" Swinburne went on, "quite clear of all whining and windy lamentation; there is nothing of the blubbering and shrieking style long since

exploded. The writer delights in problems and has a natural leaning to obscure and sorrowful things. Failure and sorrow, next to physical beauty and perfection of sound or scent, seem to have an infinite attraction for him. . . . Not the luxuries of pleasures in their first simple form, but the sharp and cruel enjoyments of pain, the acrid relish of suffering felt or inflicted, the sides on which Nature looks unnatural, go to make up the stuff and substance of this poetry. . . . Even of the loathsomest bodily putrescence and decay he can make some noble use." Swinburne noticed Beaudelaire's "feline style of beauty—subtle, luxurious, with sheathed claws." Finally he said, what might appear to qualify the remark first quoted, but does not and was not meant to do so: "it is not his or any artist's business to warn against evil; but certainly he does not exhort to it, knowing well enough that the one fault is as great as the other." This is the writing of a man whose intellect, whatever his "Bohemian follies," was clear and serene.

One of Swinburne's chapters on pictures in *Essays and Studies* consists of "Notes on Designs of the old Masters at Florence," notes made during a visit in the spring of 1864. As in *William Blake* he made a number of brilliant translations of pictures into words, of a drawing by Michael Angelo, for example;

Broad bracelets divide the shapely splendour of her arms; over the nakedness of her firm and luminous breasts, just below the neck, there is passed a band as of metal. Her eyes are full of proud and passionless lust after gold and blood; her hair, close and curled, seems ready to shudder in sunder and divide into snakes. Her throat, full and fresh, round and hard to the eye as her bosom and arms, is erect and stately, the head set firm on it without any droop or lift of the chin; her mouth crueller than a tiger's, colder than a snake's, and beautiful beyond a woman's. She is the deadlier Venus incarnate;

> πολλὴ μὲν ἐν θεοῖσι κοὐκ ἀνώνυμος
> θεά·

for upon earth also many names might be found for her; Lamia re-transformed, invested now with a fuller beauty, but divested of all feminine attributes not native to the snake—a Lamia loveless and unassailable by the Sophist, readier to drain life out of her lover than to fade for his sake at his side; or the Persian Amestris, watching the only breasts on earth more beautiful than her own cut off from her rival's living bosom; or Cleopatra, not dying but turning serpent under the serpent's bite; or that queen of the extreme East who with her husband marked every day as it went by some device of a new and wonderful cruelty."

By these fancies he prepared for his own *Faustine*, for Pater's meditation on La Gioconda, for the metamorphoses of Dorian Gray.

Of one head which might be a boy's or a girl's, "having in it the delicious doubt of ungrown

beauty, pausing at the point where the ways of loveliness divide," he says, thinking perhaps both of his own and Musset's *Fragoletta*—"we may give it the typical strawberry flower (*Fragoletta*) and leave it to the Loves."

This visit to Italy confirmed his love of her. Italy, like the sea, became his "Mother"; she had made him, he said, before his lips could sing her "choral-souled boy priest." Siena became "the lovely city of my love." Above all at Fiesole, with an introduction from Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), he called on Landor, the Roman-hearted gentleman, republican, poet, scholar, lover of Italy, disliker of Byron, who had gained "a double crown of glory in verse and in prose" like Milton's and no other Englishman's since, whom, henceforward, man and poet, Swinburne was to praise and re-praise and over-praise continually. He asked and obtained permission to dedicate *Atalanta in Calydon* to Landor, but by the intervention of death was compelled to dedicate it, which he did in Greek, to Landor's memory, adding a memorial poem to *Poems and Ballads*, and to *Studies in Song* a "Song" eight hundred lines long for the centenary, though five years late (1880). Yet further indirect tributes he paid in verse from time to time, by his deification of tyrannicide, for Landor had written a poem, with a note

from Cicero's "Philippics," called "Tyrannicide," saying:

> Most dear of all the virtues to her sire
> Is Justice; and most dear
> To Justice is Tyrannicide . . .

Other literary influence on Swinburne, except perhaps in confirming his tendency to massiveness in prose, Landor had none; for he was the calmest, most temperate, and most motionless of poets; the author of *Atalanta* was the least calm, the most intemperate, the fullest of motion. But for many years Swinburne liked to recall how Landor, "Republican and Atheist," who had encouraged and strengthened the young spirit of Shelley half a century before, had done the same for "another young man who aspired to show himself a poet."

III

THE APPROACH

After *Atalanta*, but in the same year, Swinburne published another play, begun, at least, when he was an undergraduate, in the period of *Rosamond* and *The Queen Mother*. Later revision probably made *Chastelard* a far more characteristic piece. The style, for example, is marked by ways that were to prevail in it thenceforward. Such is the repetition of the long "a" sound in these lines:

> They shall not say but I had grace to give
> Even for love's sake. Why, let them take their way;

in many other places, and throughout Mary's speech beginning, "One of you maidens there"; the repetition also of the same word, as here:

> He says your grace given would scathe yourself,
> And little grace for such a grace as that . . .;

the fondness for an oft-repeated "i" as in:

> And then fall blind and die with sight of it;

and for chiming like "lied and died" and

> Have made up my heart
> To have no part;

repetition of an idea under different forms, often with a deceptive appearance of precision, as in:

> Of sweet came sour, of day came night,
> Of long desire came brief delight;

a triumphant use of nothing but monosyllables, for as many as seven lines on end in Mary Beaton's speech beginning, "Nay, let love wait." Throughout the play the variety and fluidity of the lines make the least speeches pleasant to read.

The subject is the love, evasively and incompletely returned, of the poet Chastelard for Mary Stuart (whom he had followed out of France to Scotland), and his execution for "the offence or misfortune of a second detection at night in her bedchamber." Chastelard was beloved by one of Mary's "four Maries," Mary Beaton, who tried to save him, and at his death prayed for revenge:

> *So perish the Queen's traitors!* yea, but so
> Perish the Queen!

In the third part of the trilogy on Mary Stuart, Mary Beaton watched the execution of the

Queen, the avenging of Chastelard, and heard Elizabeth's men cry, "So perish the Queen's traitors!"

The play tells a story of aristocratic and poetic courtship delicately, luxuriously, picturesquely, with perfect sympathy and love of love. No one else had made it superfluous by telling the story in the same way and as well. Swinburne himself could probably not at that time have told it in the same way, if as well, in direct narrative like that of *Tristram* or *Balen*: question of the dramatic form is therefore idle. As in *The Queen Mother*, there are many striking encounters fitted with appropriate words; but as in *Rosamond*, the characters talk about themselves and one and another: Mary is "quite sure I shall die sadly some day"; she knows "that I am beautiful"; and describes the battle of Corrichie and how she rode with her good men and took delight as Swinburne would have described it, but a little more briefly. The story is enriched, but even more retarded, by numerous picturesque delays of song or dance with lyric or pathetic comment. Mary takes Chastelard's sword, and seeing her fingers

> Clear in the blade, bright pink, the shell colour,

becomes dreamy and suggests wearing it, and pretending to be a man, Chastelard to be a

woman. A very pretty book might be made out of the pretty, amorous, stately, melancholy passages. Like the poet, these men and women love the clear, visible world of things under the sun, with a certain fever at thought of things which are under the earth. When Mary sees her maids talking together she says:

> You weep and whisper *with sloped necks and heads*
> *Like two sick birds.*

In one place she describes the device on a breast-clasp as closely and well as Swinburne describes a picture; she describes the dress in which she looks so beautiful, and notes, "I am too pale to be so hot." Chastelard, alone in prison, sees the last sunbeam of his life in the dust as clearly as if it were a childish memory. The Scottish citizen, remembering a sermon against Mary and the foreigners, is equally vivid with his picture of Pharaoh's men "beautiful with red and with red gold . . . curling their small beards Agag-fashion," and the woman

> That got bruised breasts in Egypt, when strange men
> Swart from great suns, foot-burnt with angry soils
> And strewn with sand of gaunt Chaldean miles,
> Poured all their love upon her. . . .

(Here Swinburne was experimenting towards the *Aholibah* of his *Poems and Ballads.*) Chastelard will remember, even in the grave, Mary's lips,

More hot than wine, full of sweet wicked words
Babbled against mine own lips, and long hands
Spread out and pale bright throat and pale bright breasts.

Nor will the reader of the play forget them and her many cruel or bold or graceful or inflaming acts. Down to the eyelash, nay, the "very inside of the eyelid," and "the blue sweet of each particular vein," the picture of the woman is finished with amorous hands. The "splendour of great throat" and the lips "curled over, red and sweet," owed something perhaps to Rossetti's studio. The snake at her heart that "quivered like a woman in act to love," seen by Chastelard in a dream, may also have come from a picture, but certainly became Swinburne's own, like the "curled lips"; Chastelard, for instance, would like to have his soul bitten to death by joy and "end in the old asp's way, Egyptian wise"—in the cruelty of extreme desire he says that to die of life is "sweeter than all sorts of life."

The chief characteristic of the play is that Chastelard and Mary are lovers rather of love than of one another. They think and dream about love more than they love, and they come as near as persons of spirit can to sickliness. This is no fault, but a limitation. It was Swinburne's intention, and no accident: not perhaps conscious, but nevertheless the intention of his nature which was towards amorousness, the

love and luxury of love. Thus *Chastelard* is like a lyric multiplied and evolved into a play. Less than in other plays do the lyrics contained in it stand out clearly, like single ships on a wide sea. The fragment,

> Aloys la châtelaine
> Voit venir de par Seine
> Thiébault la capitaine,

is but a decoration among decorations. But Mary Beaton herself stands out against the decorations almost like a song. It is she that sings the one English song:

> Between the sunset and the sea
> My love laid hands and lips on me;
> Of sweet came sour, of day came night,
> Of long desire came brief delight;
> Ah love, and what thing came of thee
> Between the sea-downs and the sea? . . .

She opens the play with a French song as she sits with the other three Maries in the upper chamber in Holyrood. Then she is sad with singing and sad to hold her peace, but by the end of the play her dainty sadness has grown to a full sorrow coupled with a hate. She is like Denise in *The Queen Mother*, and shows the poet's feeling for greys among scarlets, purples and greens.

IV

POEMS AND BALLADS

When the Chorus in *Atalanta*, speaking magnificently in spite of their conclusion that "silence is most noble till the end," spoke of God as "the supreme evil God" and said:

> All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high,

readers were confused because it sounded like the Old Testament; *Chastelard* disturbed them because in it God undoubtedly looked small beside Lust, not to speak of Love; *Poems and Ballads* made them indignant. At least the poet cannot have disappointed them. They must have guessed that

> All day long
> He used to sit and jangle words in rhyme
> To suit with shakes of faint adulterous sound
> Some French lust in men's ears. . . .

In the new volume "crueller than God" is a term of comparison, God being a name for the Supreme Being of Christian or Heathen. But the "pale Galilean" also is accused and his end foretold; in spite even of his power when it was

yet new the worshipper of Proserpina could for a moment cease to lament and say:

Wilt thou yet take all, Galilean? but these thou shalt not take,
The laurel, the palms and the pæan, the breast of the nymphs in the brake;
Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with tenderer breath;
And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before Death. . . .

In *Dolores* the poet asks—

What ailed us, O Gods, to desert you
For creeds that refuse and restrain?

and in *Laus Veneris* the knight of Venus compares Venus with Christ:

Alas, Lord, surely thou art great and fair.
But lo, her wonderfully woven hair!

On the other hand the story of St. Dorothy and *The Christmas Carol*, "suggested by a drawing of Mr. D. G. Rossetti's," are faultlessly devout; and *The Masque of Queen Bersabe* is a miracle play including a pageant of fair women but ending *et tunc dicant laudamus; Aholibah* is a chapter of Ezekiel put almost unchanged into verse. The writer might have been a member of the Church of England, or a Catholic, though hardly a dissenter, and almost certainly not a communicant. He abused God that he might exalt Love and Life. In the

same way his lovers talk of death only because they are so much in love with life and love that they are indignant at the shortness thereof. They are protesting against the view of that other poet:

> I am but a stranger here;
> Heaven is my home:
> Earth is a desert drear;
> Heaven is my home. . . .

So, too, they speak often of weariness to show the fury of life that has led to it; and of pallor to prove how they have spent their blood; and of sorrow that it may be known they have tasted joy even to the end; and as to sin, they are monks and nuns in a shrine "where a sin is a prayer."

At the end the poet could call it all a "revel of rhymes."

It is even more true of *Poems and Ballads* than of *Chastelard* that there is less love in it than love of love, more passionateness than passion. Yet in another sense it is all love and all passion, pure and absolute love and passion that have found "no object worth their constancy," and so have poured themselves out on light loves, dead women, women that never were alive except in books, and "daughters of dreams." Few other books are as full of the learning, passing at times into pedantry, of love;

experience, fancy, and books have been ransacked to store it, nor could anything but a divine vitality have saved it from rancidity, putrescence, dust. The vitality ascends to the height of terror, that panic terror of noon which superstition truly discerned. In the midst of it stands the poet, a young man of an ancient border family with flame-coloured hair, a brilliant human being who lived seventy-two years, and for the most part flourished, until he died of influenza and pneumonia. He resembles the beautiful tyrant in *Dolores:*

> When, with flame all around him aspirant,
> Stood, flushed as a harp-player stands,
> The implacable beautiful tyrant,
> Rose-crowned, having Death in his hands;
> And a sound as the sound of loud water
> Smote far through the flight of the fires,
> And mixed with the lightning of slaughter
> A thunder of lyres.

Until virtue produces a book fuller of life we can only accept the poet's own label of sin in peril of blasphemy. Nor is it inapt to recall that Richard Jefferies, one of the holiest of pagans and a lover of *Poems and Ballads*, named his sweetest heroine after one of its women, Felise, and seems to reflect some of its ardours in The Story of My Heart.

Yet Swinburne did affix this label of sin. He took it from the world and gloried in it, coup-

ling it with Love and Time; coupling Desire with Pain, Pleasure, Satiety, and Hate; also with Sorrow and Death. Now he was dwelling on "loves perverse" and the "raptures and roses of vice" in contrast with the "lilies and languors of virtue"; now calling sin "sweet," but "brief beyond regret," and only a "brief bitter bliss"; acknowledging "all the sting and all the stain of long delight"; yet again acclaiming "the strange great sins." Seldom is there any pure so-called pagan delight in what may afterwards be judged sin. At one time the very name of "sin" is given where the world gives it; at another the pain and the weariness, the feverishness, the bitterness, the faintness of it are published, with moans or laughter. He consciously exalts the name of sin, as Baudelaire did *La Débauche et la Mort . . . deux aimables filles;* and Lady Macbeth, *âme puissante au crime;* and the Night of Michael Angelo:

> Qui tors paisablement dans un pose étrange
> Tes appas façonnés aux bouches des Titans;

and the impure woman, that blind and deaf machine, the queen of sins, the bizarre goddess, the demon without pity:

> Elle croit, elle sait, cette vierge inféconde
> Et portant nécessaire à la marche du monde,
> Que la beauté du corps est un sublime don
> Qui de toute infamie arrache le pardon.

But Swinburne is more detached than Baudelaire; his praises are lighter, and being from the lips outward are less sincere as well as more immoderate and unqualified. In a spirit of gay and amateur perversity he flatters sin with the appellations of virtue, as George Herbert gave his religious poetry the unction of love. There is no remorse, no repentance:

> Until God loosen over sea and land
> The thunder and the trumpets of the night.

The lovers are bruised and regretful but unrepenting so long as they may "live and not languish or feign." Even if "the keen edge of sense foretasteth sin" they cannot relent. Barrenness, sterility, perversity, monstrosity, cruelty, satiety, are made into praises of Love and Sin. *Omne animal post coitum triste est*, as a criticism, cannot touch the wild drift of the rhymes. If evil and misery have this sweetness and tumultuous force, show me what is good and joyous. Civilization and Christianity, England and Puritanism, aristocratic breeding and a classical education, and we know not what, gave this man a curious knowledge of bodily love and a loyal ardour, a wonderful sweetness and mightiness of words, to celebrate it as it was and as it had been. He brought all the rays of life to bear upon this one thing,

making it show forth in turn the splendour and gloom and strangeness of the earth and its inhabitants. And one of his chief energies arose out of opposition to the common, easy condemnation or ignoring or denial of this thing. He rebelled against the stupid ideal of colourless polite perfection which would paste strips of paper here and there over the human body, as Christina Rossetti did over the words, "the supreme evil, God," in her copy of *Atalanta*. Personally, he was, I believe, not opposed to the Criminal Law Amendment Act or even to Divorce Law Reform. He sang what in his hours of intensest life most rapt the attention of his keenest powers of mind and body together.

But, as a rule, he is not directly expressing a personal emotion or experience. Few of the completely characteristic poems of this volume are or could have been addressed to one woman: it is quite likely that the poet seldom felt monogamous "three whole days together," and that if he knew the single-hearted devotion to one woman often expressed by Shakespeare, Burns, Shelley, Wordsworth, or Rossetti, he never expressed it, unless it was in *A Leave-taking*. Instead of "Margaret and Mary and Kate and Caroline," he celebrates Faustine, Fragoletta, Aholibah, Dolores, Azubah, Aholah, Ahinoam,

Atarah; and it is a shock, though a pleasant one, suddenly to come upon the *Interlude*, blithe, bright and actual, recording the happiness between the singer and a woman who came when

> There was something the season wanted,
> Though the ways and the woods smelt sweet.

This poem belongs to a class more numerous than conspicuous in Swinburne's early poetry, including, among others, *Rococo*, *Stage Love*, *A Match*, *Before Parting*, and *Anima Anceps*. They vary from the fanciful and playful to the elegiac, but are all of such a kind that they might have been not remotely connected with the writer's experience. They have in them something of Browning and something of Rossetti under the influence of Browning. They are admirably done, but they are obscured by the poems of more astonishing qualities, which were possibly drawn from a longer fermentation of the same experiences. Into the same class with them, as showing Swinburne comparatively pale and mild, go the narratives in the manner of Rossetti or some other obvious model, and the decorative verses after the style of Morris, and exercises, however consummate, like *Aholibah*, which could be thought pure Swinburne by one ignorant of Ezekiel.

Some of these lesser poems prove his ability to idealize quite blamelessly, as in the meek lines of *St. Dorothy:*

> Where she sat working, with soft bended brows,
> Watching her threads, among the school maidens.

He could be blameless to absurdity, as in speaking of the maidens' "cold, small, quiet beds." He preferred to idealize beds that were neither cold nor quiet. He himself has told us something of the origin of *Faustine:*

"*Faustine* is the reverie of a man gazing on the bitter and vicious loveliness of a face as common and as cheap as the morality of reviewers, and dreaming of past lives in which this fair face may have held a nobler or fairer station; the imperial profile may have been Faustina's, the thirsty lips a Maenad's, when first she learnt to drink blood or wine, to waste the loves and win the lives of men; through Greece and through Rome she may have passed with the same face which now comes before us dishonoured and discrowned. Whatever of merit or demerit there may be in the verses, the idea that gives them such life as they have is simple enough; the transmigration of a single soul doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty. The chance which

suggested to me this poem was one which may happen any day to any man—the sudden sight of a living face which recalled the well-known likeness of another dead for centuries: in this instance the noble and faultless type of the elder Faustina as seen in coin and bust. Out of the casual glimpse and sudden recollection these verses sprang."

That Swinburne was ready to take a hint of this kind may be seen from the story of how a lady deceived him by playing "Three Blind Mice" as a very ancient Florentine ritornello; for he found that "it reflected to perfection the cruel beauty of the Medicis." He had a nature that magnified, and taste directed his magnification towards sin and the sublimity of little-known or wholly imagined evil: nor was he incapable of deliberately flaunting vices before the incurious virtuous.

As his poems are seldom personal, so they are not real as Donne's or Byron's or Browning's are, though often "realistic" at certain points. They are magnificent, but more than human. Bliss were indeed bitter and brief if wives and mistresses were so lithe and lascivious and poisonous, snakes so numerous, blood and foam so frequent in bower and brake. They are divine rather than human, like the pictures in the temple at Sestos:

There might you see the Gods in sundry shapes,
Committing heady riots, incests, rapes:
For know, that underneath this radiant floor
Was Danae's statue in a brazen tower,
Love slyly stealing from his sister's bed,
To dally with Idalian Ganimede,
And for his love Europa bellowing loud,
And tumbling with the rainbow in a cloud. . . .

Nature and inanimate things are sympathetic; not only are the girdle and the hair "amorous," but the water round a woman bathing is "sweet, fierce water." In *A Ballad of Life* the very ballad is human flesh:

Forth, ballad, and take roses in both arms,
  Even till the top rose touch thee in the throat
Where the least thorn-prick harms;
  And girdled in thy golden singing-coat,
Come thou before my lady and say this;
  Borgia, thy gold hair's colour burns in me,
Thy mouth makes beat my blood in feverish rhymes;
  Therefore so many as these roses be,
  Kiss me so many times.
Then it may be, seeing how sweet she is,
  That she will stoop herself none otherwise
  Than a blown vine branch doth,
And kiss thee with soft laughter on thine eyes,
  Ballad, and on thy mouth.

Except for the "vine branch," the verse gives by itself a perfect courtly picture, dainty and joyous, as a man sometimes imagines some utterly past mode of life to have been. Swinburne could use the same sensuous plenty upon

something in the ordinary plane of life, as in *At Parting*, but not without a touch almost of meanness in the absence of anything else: *In the Orchard*, a not dissimilar mediæval piece from the Provençal, is far finer, if it is not the finest of all. In his most characteristic work, as in *Laus Veneris*, *The Triumph of Time*, *Dolores*, the ballads of *Life* and *Death*, he multiplies thoughts and images, either very clear or vaguely sublime or luxurious, consistent with one another and given continuity by the mood, and still more by the lovely stanza-form. Only in the narrative work is this continuity, logical or emotional, very definite, though the pervading unity of tone usually gives a satisfactory first impression.

Of confessedly decorative poems in the style of Morris he wrote very few. He preferred forms that allowed a loose combination of the abstract and the concrete, where he could multiply melodiously, as in *A Hymn to Proserpine*, *Hesperia*, *A Lamentation*. Catalogues, like the *Masque of Queen Bersabe*, and *A Ballad of Burdens*, and all stanza forms, the more elaborate the better, permitting or commanding repetition, like *A Litany* and the Rondels, pleased him. Every form made terms with him except blank verse, which naturally did not compel him to the clear definition, the regular

pauses and slight variations of theme necessary to produce his best poems and yet to confine them; even couplets were not always firm enough in their hold on his energies.

The stanza forms of the book are numerous and very different. Some are old, but he makes the old seem new by making it leap, or making it pause with "long reluctant amorous delay," so that it hardly moves at all. Some are new or unfamiliar. Even the stanza of Omar, used for *Laus Veneris*, is transmuted, by rhyming the third lines of each pair of quatrains, and by greater variety of movement than Fitzgerald gave it. In each poem the rhythm and the arrangement of rhymes give the form a richness, a clear tangibility, which must be enjoyed for its own sake if a full half of the poem is not to be lost. They might be as fairly indicated by their metres as their subjects, except that Swinburne's use of metre is so individual that we should have to say "a study in the stanza of *Dolores*," and so on. This is true not only of the poems of love and lust, and the confessed experiments in sapphics and hendecasyllabics, but of poems with a more social significance, like those to Hugo and the memory of Landor, and the songs *In Time of Order*, *In Time of Revolution*, where the poet reveals intellectual passions. He does not, like another poet, have

to think in his metre: his mastery compels the metre to think for him.

Swinburne's style had now fully manifested itself. Some of its qualities were prominent, especially the repetition—repetition of single vowel or consonant sounds, of single words, of groups of words, of ideas. Whether always conscious or not, these were essentials in Swinburne's art. Some of them obviously make for pleasantness of sound, as in the repeated "ur" sound in "and pearl and purple and amber on her feet"; others more doubtfully, as in the frequent use of "light and night" and the like, and the "i's" of *Fragoletta:*

> O sole desire of my delight!
> O sole delight of my desire!
> Mine eyelids and eyesight
> Feed on thee day and night
> Like lips of fire.

Almost certainly unconscious were repetitions like that of the image of a wine press, four times used in *Laus Veneris* and several times elsewere: unconscious, too, the extent of the repeated use, not merely in close connection, but all through the book, of snakes and sin, of the words lithe, pale, curled, sting, strange, sad, great, soft, sweet, barren, sterile, etc., and of collocations like:

Or poisonous foam on the tender tongue
Of the little snakes that eat my heart.

But repetition was not the only element in the sweetness and sonority of *Poems and Ballads*. As Swinburne loved the vowel sound in "light," so he did all full vowels, especially in combination with l, r, m, and n, as in the line:

Comfort and cool me as dew in the dawn of a moon like a dream.

Much as he delighted in the speed of the anapæst with its subdued "of the," "in the," "and the," "of a," "in a," "and a," etc., he delighted also in the slow long vowels close together which make the end of the last line of *A Ballad of Life* a kiss:

And kiss thee with soft laughter on thine eyes,
Ballad, and on thy mouth.

The rich effect of the repeated "th," of the "m," the "i," and the "ou," apart from the rhyme, is incomparably beyond that of the same idea—if it be called so—had it been expressed by

Ballad, and *on the Lips*.

Sometimes he must bring together "thine" and "heart," as when he does so and gives such fondness to the slow line:

The soft south whither thine heart is set.

Rather more than nothing perhaps is sacrificed to sound, but far more to the need for a stately, a delicate, or a sublime setting to Love, Time and Sin. The love of all lovely and pleasant things deludes to some inexcusably amplified similes. It may do no harm to the praise of a woman to say that

> Her breasts are like white birds,
> And all her gracious words
> As water-grass to herds
> In the June days:

it certainly does not: but when Demeter in *At Eleusis* describes herself unswaddling the infant Triptolemus,

> Unwinding cloth from cloth
> As who unhusks an almond to the white
> And pastures curiously the purer taste,

she indulges the sense of taste inopportunely. Other similes are carried so far that the matter of the simile is more important in the total than what it appeared to intensify; others merely add to the quality, not inharmonious and not quite intelligible nor asking to be wholly understood, of the passage, as in *Hesperia:*

> And my heart yearns baffled and blind, moved vainly toward thee, and moving
> As the refluent seaweed moves in the languid exuberant stream,

Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water in prison,
That stretches and swings to the low passionate pulse of the sea,
Closed up from the air and the sun, but alive, as a ghost rearisen,
Pale as the love that revives as a ghost rearisen in me.

Here no likely reader will inquire, far enough to be troubled, what it is that resembles the rose, or that stretches and swings, or that is closed up from the air; or object that finally the subject of the comparison is virtually used as a comparison for the comparison. Neither perhaps should it be complained that in the same poem Death is both a person and a something with "iron sides" through which hell can be seen; that in the same poem Love is a "bloomless bower," and only "lives a day"; that there are beds "full of perfume and sad sound," and doors "made" with music and "barred round" with sighing and laughter and tears, and that with the tears "strong souls of men are bound": nor complained that very different things are frequently spoken of as if belonging to the same class, as "lips," "foam," and "fangs," or "serpents" and "cruelties," "summer and perfume and pride," "sand and ruin and gold," "the treading of wine" and "the feet of the dove," "spring and seed and swallow"; and that exact correspondence is wanting in the lines:

For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest time and mowing.

Where metaphor and simile crowd they have a lower scale of values than common, and no attempt need be made to see Love filling itself with tears, girdling itself with sighing, letting its ears be filled with "rumour of people sorrowing," wearing sighs (not sighing) for a raiment, decorated with "pains" and "many a grievous thing," and having sorrows "for armlet and for gorget and for sleeve." I do not know how to defend it, except that in practice and in a state of sobriety that verse of *A Ballad of Death* can be read with pleasure and without question. But this confusion of categories and indefinite definiteness of images is as common in Swinburne's poetry, as in bad prose. He will say that a woman is "clothed like summer with sweet hours," but that at the same time her eyelids are shaken and blue and filled with sorrow. He will say also that she had a cithern strung with the "subtle-coloured" hair of a dead lute-player, the seven strings being charity, tenderness, pleasure, sorrow, sleep, and sin, and "loving kindness, that is pity's kin and is most pitiless"; while of the three men with her one is pity and another is sorrow. Who the lady is and who "my lady" is, and what in *A Ballad of Life* his soul meant in saying:

> This is marvellous
> Seeing the air's face is not so delicate
> Nor the sun's grace so great,
> If sin and she be kin or amorous,

remains a matter for subtle and perhaps eternal debate. Marvellous it also is that such confusion of what must be and what cannot be visualized should yet be harmonized by rhythm, by sweetness of words, and by the dominant ideas of Love, etc., into something which on the whole the mind accepts and the spirit embraces. At the same time, not all the vagueness is good. "Grey old miseries" is not good; nor is "hours of fruitful breath" or "lands wherein time grows"; "the wild end of things" is an inadequate description of the scene of Prometheus' agony. There are places, too, where the poet's figurative use of "clothed" and "clad," from the first page to the last but one, is vain, as when "the wave of the world" is said to be "clad about with seas as with wings" and also "impelled of invisible tides." The source may, perhaps, be found in the Biblical "clothed in thunder," which is said to be a sublimity of mistranslation.

The Bible gave him the matter and language of the whole of *A Litany*, and with Malory and Morris gave him something at least of his taste for monosyllables, the archaism of words like "certes," "right gladly then," "begot," and

of whole poems like *The Masque of Queen Bersabe*. From Rossetti he took the habit of rhyming "waters" with "hers" and so on; from Baudelaire something of his Satanism and some of his snakes; from Hugo some of his exuberance. But these elements are seldom unduly conspicuous save under a microscope. Elements peculiarly his own are far more conspicuous. Love of sound and especially of rhyme persuaded him to a somewhat lighter use of words than is common among great poets. Space would be wasted by examples of words produced apparently by submission to rhyme, not mastery over it. The one line in *Hesperia*:

> Shrill shrieks in our faces the blind bland air that was mute as a maiden,

is enough to illustrate the poet's carelessness of the fact that alliteration is not a virtue in itself.

Since the adjective is most ready when words are wanted he used a great number, yet without equally great variety. He kept as it were a harem of words, to which he was constant and absolutely faithful. Some he favoured more than others, but he neglected none. He used them more often out of compliment than of necessity. Compare his "bright fine lips" with the passages quoted by Ruskin from Shakespeare, Shelley, Suckling, and Leigh Hunt. They do not belong to the same school of lan-

guage as "Here hung those lips," or Suckling's

> Her lips were red, and one was thin
> Compared with that was next her chin.
> (Some bee had stung it newly.)

"Bright" and "fine" could doubtless be applied to lips with perfect aptness, but they are not applied so here. They are complimentary and not descriptive. Swinburne admired brightness, and he called a woman's lips "bright" and in the next stanza but one a blackbird "bright." I do not know what "fine" means, but I suspect that it is not much more definite than the vulgar "fine" and his own "splendid." A group of his epithets, as in "the lost white feverish limbs" of the drowned Sappho, has sometimes the effect of a single epithet by a master like Keats. Many epithets express the poet's opinions of things as much as their qualities, as in "marvellous chambers," "strange weathers," "keen thin fish," "mystic and sombre Dolores," "strong broken spirit of a wave," "hard glad weather," "purple blood of pain," "feverish weather," "shameful scornful lips," "splendid supple thighs," "sad colour of strong marigolds," "clean great time of goodly fight," "fair pure sword," "like a snake's love lithe and fierce," "heavenly hair," "heavenly hands," "mute melancholy lust of heaven," "fine drouth," "fierce reluctance of

disastrous stars," "tideless dolorous midland sea," "fresh fetlocks," "fervent oars," or the fourteen epithets applied to Dolores. The epithets in the last stanza of *A Ballad of Death* are all appropriate to the intention of the poet—"rusted," "rain-rotten," "waste," "late unhappy"—and in keeping with the ideas of fading, sighing, groaning, bowing down, evening and death—but are for the most part but indifferently fitted for their respective places, and could perhaps safely be transposed in half a dozen ways without affecting the sense, though I shall not prove it. That transposition would change and probably spoil the total effect there is no denying.

But Swinburne has almost no magic felicity of words. He can astonish and melt but seldom thrill, and when he does it is not by any felicity of as it were God-given inevitable words. He has to depend on sound and an atmosphere of words which is now and then concentrated and crystallized into an intensity of effect which is almost magical, perhaps never quite magical. This atmosphere comes from a vocabulary very rich in words connected with objects and sensations and emotions of pleasure and beauty, but used, as I have said, somewhat lightly and even in appearance indiscriminately. No poet could be poorer in brief electric phrases,

pictorial or emotional. The first line of *Hesperia*—

> Out of the golden remote wild west where the sea without shore is,

is an example of Swinburne's way of accumulating words which altogether can suggest rather than infallibly express his meaning. "Golden," "remote," "wild," "west," "sea," and "without shore" all have already some emotional values, of which the line gives no more than the sum, the rhythm and grammatical connection saving the words from death and inexpressiveness. In the whole opening passage of this poem there is the same accumulation, aided by the vague, as in "region of stories" and "capes of the past oversea."

Perhaps the greatest of his triumphs is in keeping up a stately solemn play of words not unrelated to the object suggested by his title and commencement but more closely related to rhymes, and yet in the end giving a compact and powerful impression. The play of words often on the very marge of nonsense has acted as an incantation, partly by pure force of cadence and kiss of rhymes, partly by the accumulative force of words in the right key though otherwise lightly used. Hardly one verse means anything in particular, hardly one line means

anything at all, but nothing is done inconsistent with the opening, nothing which the rashest critic would venture to call unavailing in the complete effect. Single words are used in some poems, verses in others, as contributive rather than essential; their growth is by simple addition rather than evolution. Some pieces could probably lose a verse or two without mutilation or any loss. *Faustine* or *Dolores*, for example, could; and *Felise* would not miss many a verse, and several of those phrases like

> The sweetest name that ever love
> Grew weary of,

in which it is exceptionally rich. Who would miss a couple of queens from the crowd of Herodias, Aholibah, Cleopatra, Abihail, Azubah, Aholah, Ahinoam, Atarah, Semiramis, Hesione, Chrysothemis, Thomyris, Harhas, Myrrha, Pasiphae, Sappho, Messalina, Amestris, Ephrath, Pasithea, Alaciel, Erigone? Who could weep at the loss of a verse in the poems, *To Victor Hugo*, or *In Memory of Walter Savage Landor*, which not even exaggeration can save? And yet at the same time the man who would not miss Azubah or Atarah would not willingly consent to her disappearance. It was not a good thing to use simple addition very often as Shelley had done once in The Sky-Lark; but Swinburne

also wrote *In an Orchard*, *Itylus*, *Anima Anceps*, *The Garden of Proserpine*, and *Before Dawn*, where addition had no part, where English words sang together as before 1866 they had never done. In some of the poems, and consummately in *Anima Anceps*, the rhyming words have a life of their own, as of birds singing or fauns dancing.

V

OPINIONS: PROSE-WORKS

England is said to have been troubled by the sound of Swinburne praying to Dolores to "forgive us our virtues." "The average Englishman," says an Edinburgh reviewer, "is not easily thrown by the most potent spells into a state of amorous delirium"; he is anxious also that others should share his salvation. The book was withdrawn from sale by Moxon, but taken over by Hotten. The "clatter," said Swinburne at a much later day, gave him the pleasure of comparing "the variously inaccurate verdicts of the scornful or mournful censors who insisted on regarding all the studies of passion or sensation attempted or achieved in it as either confessions of positive fact or excursions of absolute fancy"; in the Dedicatory Epistle to the *Collected Poems* (1904) he was content to say that "there are photographs from life in the book; and there are sketches from imagination." He withdrew nothing. "There is not," he said in The Athenæum, 1877, "one piece, there is not

one line, there is not one word, there is not one syllable in any one copy ever printed of that book which has ever been changed or cancelled since the day of publication."

The best-known attack, Robert Buchanan's article on "The Fleshly School of Poetry" over the signature of "Thomas Maitland," appeared in The Contemporary in 1871, five years after *Poems and Ballads*. In this article Tennyson's Maud was summoned to receive blame for affording "distinct precedent for the hysteric tone and overloaded style which is now so familiar to readers of Mr. Swinburne." Mingling amused contempt with righteous anger, he called the author of *Anactoria* and *Laus Veneris* "only a little mad boy letting off squibs." Swinburne's reply, *Under the Microscope*, was withheld on account of an abusive digression upon Tennyson's Idylls of the King, the "Morte d'Arthur" and its "lewd circle of strumpets and adulterers revolving round the central figure of their inane wittol"; but it is worth reading for some of the criticism in that digression, and for the loose and merry vigour of the retaliation upon Buchanan of which this may serve as a specimen:

Well may this incomparable critic, this unique and sovereign arbiter of thought and letters ancient and modern, remark with compassion and condemnation, how inevitably

a training in Greek literature must tend to "emasculate" the student so trained; and well may we congratulate ourselves that no such process as robbed of all strength and manhood the intelligence of Milton has had power to impair the virility of Mr. Buchanan's robust and masculine genius. To that strong and severe figure we turn from the sexless and nerveless company of shrill-voiced singers who share with Milton the curse of enforced effeminacy; from the pitiful soprano notes of such dubious creatures as Marlowe, Jonson, Chapman, Gray, Coleridge, Shelley, Landor, *cum semiviro comitatu*, we avert our ears to catch the higher and manlier harmonies of a poet with all his natural parts and powers complete. For truly, if love or knowledge of ancient art and wisdom be the sure mark of "emasculation" and the absence of any taint of such love or any tincture of such knowledge (as then in consistency it must be) the supreme sign of perfect manhood, Mr. Robert Buchanan should be amply competent to renew the Thirteenth labour of Hercules.

> One would not be a young maid in his way
> For more than blushing come to.

Nevertheless, in a country where (as Mr. Carlyle says in his essay on Diderot) indecent exposure is an offence cognizable at police offices, it might have been as well for him to uncover with less immodest publicity the gigantic nakedness of his ignorance. . . .

For some time after this Swinburne indulged in the pleasure of harassing Buchanan, the "polypseudonymous lyrist and libeller," with prose and verse of some humour and much hilarity. In later years he is said to have called

his early poems, or some of them, "sins of youth." The crude mass of popular opinion had perhaps made him feel that he had been too much of a propagandist, or Satanic missionary. Whether or not he felt that he had been guilty of "some more or less inappropriate extravagance of expression," as in some "hasty" topical lines long afterwards, he had no wish to stand at street corners beseeching all that would be saved to adopt a wholesale un-English immorality. He might not object to Maupassant's picture of himself as perhaps the most extravagantly artistic being then upon the face of the earth, a fantastic apparition, dwelling among fantastic pictures and incredible books, with an equally surprising friend and a monkey, adorning his dinner table with another monkey roasted. He himself told how, when he was rescued from drowning off the coast of France, he was wrapped in a sail by the fisherman and beguiled the return with declamations from the poetry of Victor Hugo. In later years he declared at a supper party that if he could indulge his whim he would build a castle with seven towers, and in each of the towers daily should be enacted one of the seven deadly sins; he enjoyed saying that "after Catullus and Ovid," there was probably no poet "with whose influence a pious parent or a judicious preceptor should be so

anxious to imbue or may be so confident of imbuing the innocent mind of ingenuous youth," as Musset. But he spoke in elderly tones of the decay coming upon Musset "which unmistakably denotes and inevitably chastises a youth not merely passionate or idle, sensual or self-indulgent, but prurient and indifferent, callous and effeminate at once"; he condemned with impatience Keats' early verses as "some of the most vulgar and fulsome doggerel ever whimpered by a vapid and effeminate rhymester in the sickly stage of whelphood"; and pronounced that "a manful kind of man or even a manly sort of boy, in his love-making or in his suffering, will not howl and snivel after such a lamentable fashion" as Keats in his letters to Fanny Brawne.

Swinburne had in fact something like the standards of any other Englishman of his class in most matters excepting art and beauty. Even his view of art was modified to suit these standards in the presence of so new a phenomenon as Zola or Whitman. "What," he asked, when Zola's L'Assommoir was appearing in *La République des Lettres:*

> What in the name of common sense, of human reason, is it to us, whether the author's private life be or be not comparable only, for mystic and infantile purity, to that of such men as Marcus Aurelius or St. Francis of Assisi,

if his published work be what beyond all possible question it is—comparable only for physical and for moral abomination to such works as, by all men's admission, it is impossible to call into such a court as the present, and there bring them forward as the sole fit subjects for comparison; for the simple and sufficient reason, that the mention of their very names in print is generally, and not unnaturally, considered to be of itself an obscene outrage on all literary law and prescription of propriety?

He confessed with some *naïveté* that he had not read the book through and could not do. He was not interested in the matter of L'Assommoir; he felt himself perhaps confronted with an enemy of his class and tradition; he proved to himself that it was not a work of art and condemned it. In the case of Whitman he began by admiring the democracy and the sexual freedom of Leaves of Grass. He said in 1872 that as far as he knew he was entirely at one with Whitman "on general matters not less than on political"; to him the views of life set forth by Whitman appeared "thoroughly acceptable and noble, perfectly credible and sane"; in *Songs before Sunrise* he had called out to the American poet:

> Send but a song over sea for us,
> Heart of their hearts who are free,
> Heart of their singer, to be for us
> More than our singing can be. . . .

But by 1887 Whitman's opinions were no longer sufficient to excuse his form or his conscious purpose. Therefore Swinburne said that "Macpherson could at least evoke shadows: Mr. Tupper and Mr. Whitman can only accumulate words. The informing principle of his work is not so much the negation as the contradiction of the creative principle of poetry." So much for his art. As for his opinions, "Mr. Whitman's Venus is a Hottentot wench under the influence of cantharides and adulterated rum," and in *Studies in Prose and Poetry* Swinburne appealed to public taste in an eloquent passage beginning: "If nothing that concerns the physical organism of men or of women is common or unclean or improper for literary manipulation . . ."

In brief, Swinburne in his fiftieth year felt that Whitman, his ideas and his methods, were incompatible with fact and fancy at Eton, Capheaton, Paphos or Putney. Probably he was already equally admiring and "adoring" both Imogen and Cleopatra, both Blake and Baudelaire, in the days of *Poems and Ballads* and of his first love of Whitman, when it seemed to him that the qualities common to Blake and Whitman were so many and grave as "to afford some ground of reason to those who preach the transition of souls or transfusion

of spirits." So, too, when he had had enough of Whitman and abused him with a virulence due perhaps in part to shame at his former admiration, he retained his detestation of Puritanism "from whose inherited and infectious tyranny this nation is as yet (1889) but imperfectly delivered." It may be surmised also that he continued to be able to enjoy the rich strong humour of Jonson's Bartholomew Fair, having refused to leave the table in disgust at the coarseness of the meats and the rankness of the sauces. He did not resent Aristophanes or Rabelais. But Coprology or the Science of Filth he "left to Frenchmen," at a time when his patriotism had the upper hand. Moreover, he condemned Wycherley's Country Wife as one of the disgraces of our literature—"the mere conception . . . displays a mind so prurient and leprous, uncovers such an unfathomable and unimaginable beastliness of imagination, that in the present age he would probably have figured as a virtuous journalist and professional rebuker of poetic vice or artistic aberration." Nor could he stomach the "realism and obscenity" of Shakespeare's third period, the "fetid fun and rancid ribaldry of Pandarus and Thersites": though he was ineligible for membership of a Society for the Suppression of Shakespeare or Rabelais, of Homer or the

Bible, he could feel only repulsion on reading the prose portions of the fourth act of "Pericles." He was glad to be rid of these things, the only matter in Shakespeare's work which could be unattractive to the perceptions of "any healthy-minded and reasonable human creature." Nor should it be forgotten that he thought no man ever did Shakespeare better service than Bowdler, who "made it possible to put him into the hands of intelligent and imaginative children."

These words were written thirteen years after the publication of *Poems and Ballads*. With very short intervals Swinburne probably admired "healthy-minded and reasonable" human creatures all the days of his life. With aberrations, he was himself a healthy-minded and reasonable man. He thought Charles Dickens the "greatest Englishman of his generation," and though his expressions were too easily excessive, he was at most points in agreement with general or respectable opinion, when he had not, as in the case of Blake or Fitzgerald, powerfully helped to create it, or far preceded it. Never a shy solitary singer, he gradually took a public or national, though not a popular, position. He wrote patriotic sonnets about the Armada and about the Boer War. Even when not a patriot he was a passionate lover of England, of her fields and waters, of her great men,

from the Bastard in King John to Cromwell and Nelson, from Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton to Landor and Shelley; and generously he praised them, with a kind of mingled stateliness and excitement, conservatism and revolutionism. He would not have Arnold speak of England as if it were the whole of Philistia, and wisely answered a certain page with: "I do not say that marriage dissoluble only in an English divorce court is a lovely thing or a venerable; I do say that marriage indissoluble except by Papal action is not." He not only loved Shakespeare and Rabelais and Cervantes, but it pleased him to repeat it: "And now abideth Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, these three; but the greatest of these is Shakespeare." If "to recognize their equal, even their better when he does come," were the test of great men, as Swinburne says it is their delight, great would he be, for his praise of Hugo, Leconte de Lisle, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Rossetti, Dickens, Mrs. Browning. . . . He lived by admiring usually to the point of adoration, which was for him religion, though he scorned idolatry. For on the whole he was glad of the earth and what was upon it, past and present. He preferred Milton's Areopagitica to Carlyle's Latter Day Pamphlets, and Athens to New York, but he believed also

in "the incalculable progress of humanity" since Shakespeare's death, and he enjoyed the incomparable felicity of sharing the earth with Victor Hugo.

As to the formal religions current in his time he could seldom speak of them with much civility, and there is no reason for doubting that he shared the feeling of the singer of the *Hymn to Proserpine* about "ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods." Abuse of the deity was one of his chief poetic pleasures. Of priests he always wrote as if inspired to outgo Shelley's indignation at thought of "the priest, the slave and the liberticide." His indignation went, in fact, so far as partly to disable him from appreciating Dante, for the "ovens and cesspools" of whose Inferno he expressed careless contempt as being fit only for "the dead and malodorous level of mediæval faith." He rejoiced to discover that the author of Hamlet was a free-thinker—"that loftiest and most righteous title which any just and reasoning soul can ever deserve to claim." He had discovered also that Shakespeare, as the author of Julius Cæsar and King Lear, was a republican and a socialist. With Jesus, Swinburne had no real quarrel, but only with the Cross and its worshippers, and he once flattered Jesus by a comparison with Mazzini,

and spoke of Emily Brontë's "Christ-like long-suffering and compassion." When he had written two sonnets on the death of Louis Napoleon, with the title, *The Descent into Hell*, and the conclusion, "the dog is dead," his defence was that he could only have offended "those to whom the name of Christ and all memories connected with it are hateful, and those to whom the name of Bonaparte and all memories connected with it are not. I belong to neither class": he spoke with "horror" of the "blasphemy offered to the name and memory or tradition of Christ by the men who in gratitude for the support given to the Church by Louis Bonaparte and his empire, bestowed on the most infamous of all public criminals the name, till then reserved for one whom they professed to worship as God, of Saviour and Messiah." It had hardly been possible for Swinburne to refuse reverence to Jesus, since one of the few formal elements in his religion was his exaltation of Man in place of God. This became a form to which it was seldom possible to attach a meaning, save a vague, sublime one. At least, with all his enthusiasm, he never gave it the solemnity of that passage from Blake, which he quoted in his study of the poet:

The worship of God is, honouring His gifts in other

men according to his genius and loving the greatest men best: those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God.

Of lesser men or men whom he found himself hating he was less respectful. His enemies were "vermin." Capital punishment for "a parricide or a poisoner, a Philip the Second or a Napoleon the Third," seemed delightfully equitable. He had evidently no instinctive or philosophic regard for human life, or a very keen enjoyment of the process of taking an eye for an eye overcame it; for it was his opinion that an imaginary "dealer in professional infanticide by starvation might very properly be subjected to vivisection without anæsthetics, and that all manly and womanly minds not distorted or distracted by prepossessions or assumptions might rationally and laudably rejoice in the prospect of that legal and equitable process." Even to Victor Hugo he would not give up this sense of justice, though at a later date he preferred to say merely that it was a horrible notion that such a murderer should be "knowingly allowed for one unnecessary hour to desecrate creation and to outrage humanity by the survival of a monstrous and maleficent existence." No better proof could be given of his reasonableness and healthy-mindedness, if it is remembered that when not

speaking as a plain citizen he could praise Voltaire for doing so much "to make the instinct of cruelty not only detestable but ludicrous." A more real defection from the religion of humanity which he appeared to proclaim can only be excused on the ground of idolatry, for it is from Victor Hugo that he accepts, without comment except of overpraise, that pretty children grow up into ugly adults because "God makes and man finishes them." Which is blasphemy made doubly vicious by its conventional source and its sentimental purpose. But Swinburne would concede anything to a child in the company of Hugo.

Freedom or Liberty was a safer object of worship than Man because she could never be embodied though too easily personified. Sometimes he meant by it a state to which men looked forward as lacking some present evil of tyrant or law; sometimes "that one thing needful without which all virtue is as worthless as all pleasure is vile, all hope is shameful as all faith is abject." The Freedom of Byron and Shelley or the Freedom of the wild-hearted Emily Brontë was in his mind the object of the Republicanism which he loved for the sake of Brutus, Milton, Shelley, Landor, and Mazzini. He used the words "republic" and "republican" as freely as he had once used "love" and "sin,"

and with equal fervour. When he found in Ben Jonson the sentence:

> A tyrant, how great and mighty soever he may seem to cowards and sluggards, is but one creature, one animal,

he pronounced it worthy of Landor, and hastened to say that "such royalism as is compatible with undisguised approval of regicide or tyrannicide might not irrationally be condoned by the sternest and most rigid of republicans": he enrolled even Collins among the priests of tyrannicide. The kindly queens and princes who had adorned his poems with their beauties and their vices he quite forgot.

Mazzini was always a bigoted republican in his fight for the unity of Italy, and Swinburne would probably have gone as far as Landor in acclaiming an ideal republic and abhorring a real democracy like the American; he was content to live under a harmless hereditary sovereign and sing of a "white republic" that never was on sea or land. In the poet's mind freedom and republicanism had become inseparable from the light, so much loved by him, to which he had compared them in his adulation. They were kept fresh as well as alive by his joyous hatred of Pope "Pius Iscariot" and "Buonaparte the Bastard." As a rule he was content that "Freedom" should mean what it could, according to the reader's prejudice or capacity;

but Carlyle and Ruskin, proposing, as it seemed to him, obedience instead of self-reliance, drill instead of devotion, force instead of faith, for the world's redemption, roused him to a tract in 1866 *Of Liberty and Loyalty*, privately printed in 1909, with notes by Mr. Edmund Gosse. He accused Carlyle of a doctrine of "utter passivity and of absolute dejection." Loyalty, he said, was a different thing; "wherever there is a grain of loyalty there is a glimpse of freedom"; if we give up the freedom of choosing between love and hate we give up loyalty. He ended by asking: "What virtue can there be in giving what we have no choice but to give? in yielding that which we have neither might nor right to withhold?" "The law of the love of liberty" continued to be for him something beyond "all human laws of mere obedience." It was with Swinburne chiefly a question of personal religion: should he worship the dark goddess Obedience, or the bright Liberty? It had the advantage of suggesting to him as the "only two destinations" appropriate for the close of a rogue's career—"a gibbet or a throne." It could not seriously interfere with his mainly inherited notions of what was "manly" and what was "womanly."

Swinburne's judgments are less interesting than his tastes, even in the arts. His judgments

were often just, his reasons for them exquisite, but too often he showed how personal a matter literary criticism was to him, yet without giving up the excessive judicial pomps; far too often he could not praise one man without damning another. Therefore, too seldom could he use the power which enabled him to distinguish the perfection of the execution in The Ancient Mariner, as "not the speckless and elaborate finish which shows everywhere the fresh rasp of file or chisel on its smooth and spruce excellence; this is faultless after the fashion of a flower or a tree," or the complete devotion which led him to write that essay in *Miscellanies* about Lamb's MS. notes on Wither, intended for "those only who would treasure the slightest and hastiest scratch of [Lamb's] pen which carried with it the evidence of spontaneous enthusiasm or irritation, of unconsidered emotion or unprompted mirth."

His one wholly necessary and perhaps unfading book of prose is the study of Blake, since it gives a vivid account, a subtle but also forcible and well-supported criticism of a genius then almost new to the world and the critics; it is almost free from truculence, asseveration and waste digression; and no one has superseded any considerable part of it. The study of Shakespeare has enough virtues to make a good book:

an equal combination of sense, acuteness, scholarship and affectionate sympathy is hardly to be found elsewhere, and a style so hostile to every one of those qualities. For, as he grew older, Swinburne developed a manner of writing English such as had not raised its head since Johnson's time. Massiveness and balance were cherished in it with extraordinary singlemindedness, and humour that should have somewhat pricked their follies commonly helped to swell them, though once he admitted a Limerick into his prose, saying that literary history would hardly care to remember that "there was a bad poet named Clough, whom his friends found it useless to puff: for the public, if dull, has not quite such a skull as belongs to believers in Clough." Not that the style crushed the humour. When he described Dr. Furnivall's writing as combining "the double display of an intelligence worthy of Mr. Toots and a dialect worthy of his friend the Chicken"; when he suggested that Charles Reade "should not desire as he does not deserve to escape the honour of being defamed or to incur the ignominy of being applauded by the writers or the readers of such romances of high life as may be penned by some erotic scullion gone mad with long contemplation of the butler's calves and shoulders, or by some discarded footman who, since he was

kicked out of his last place with the spoons in his pocket, may have risen or sunk into notoriety or obscurity as a gluttonous and liquorish rhymester or novelist, patrician of the pantry, whose aristocratic meditations alternate between the horsewhip with which he is evidently familiar and the dinner with which he apparently is not —the prose and the poetry, the real and the ideal of his life"—here Swinburne added to the more usual qualities of humour that of carving in marble what should be writ in water; he made dignity laugh at itself. When he quoted Macaulay's remark that a certain passage in Crabbe's Borough has made many a rough and cynical reader cry like a child, and added that he himself was "not so rough and cynical as ever to have experienced that particular effect from its perusal," he was making the pompous letter "p" do an amusing task. But this dignity was not always laughing at itself, nor when it is can it always be sure of company. Sometimes, on the other hand, it is laughable when itself is gravest. That laugh, however, is cheerless at best, and at the end of half a dozen volumes can be but a hollow "mocking at grief." Only a long labour of most diligent eugenists could breed men to endure such sentences as this, in *The Age of Shakespeare*, concerning a dialogue in Dekker's Virgin Martyr.

Its simplicity is so childlike, its inspiration so pure in instinct and its expression so perfect in taste, its utterance and its abstinence, its effusion and its reserve, are so far beyond praise or question or any comment but thanksgiving, that these forty-two lines, homely and humble in manner as they are if compared with the refined rhetoric and the scrupulous culture of Massinger, would suffice to keep the name of Dekker sweet and safe for ever among the most honourable if not among the most pre-eminent of his kindred and his age.

Sentences of this at present superhuman long-windedness seemed to be aimed chiefly at long-windedness. It is produced by the double process of repetition and modification, both useless except for that purpose, since no one gains anything from the addition of "humble" to "homely" or from the supposed distinction between "most honourable" and "most pre-eminent." A simple love of balance and inflation compelled Swinburne to translate into the Swinburnian as it did Johnson into the Johnsonian. He would speak of the year of The Alchemist as "the year which gave to the world for all time a gift so munificent as that of The Alchemist." He would say, after mentioning George Eliot's Totty, Eppie and Lillo, that "the fiery-hearted Vestal of Haworth had no room reserved in the palace of her passionate and high-minded imagination as a nursery for inmates of such divine and delicious quality"; he forgot that

"passionate and high-minded," "divine and delicious," retarded the sentence without giving it depth, and that "divine" was in any case a vain vulgarism. But he was of a spending and ceremonious nature, and this, coupled with his artistic delight in balance, repetition and opposition, ruined his prose. At times he seems to write for the sake of constructing formally perfect and sonorous sentences, more often the kind of sentence he prefers is dictated as much by that preference as by his thought. Now he must find something unqualified to say about everybody; again he must qualify everything, and institute distinctions founded apparently rather on a love of repeating phrases than on subtlety, as when he says that Ben Jonson's Discoveries would give him "a place beside or above La Rochefoucauld, and beside if not above Chamfort"; or he will allow himself to be hag-ridden by the letter "t" and "d" as in the clause:

> Some perversity or obliquity will be suspected, even if no positive infirmity or deformity can be detected, in his intelligence or his temperament;

or having suggested "a curious monotony in the variety" will ask "if there be not a curious variety in the monotony." Had De Quincey and Dr. Johnson collaborated in imitating Lyly they must have produced Swinburnian prose.

The Bible had helped: here and there Carlyle is detected in a phrase like "Let that preferable thing be done with all the might and haste that may be attainable": Landor had given his benediction to the massiveness, Ruskin to the early picturesqueness, Hugo to the effusiveness. But from none of these could he have learned to speak of "the right to seem right"; to launch himself upon rhythms too easily detached from the context; to praise the aged Corneille's Psyche as

> A lyric symphony of spirit and of song fulfilled with all the colour and all the music that autumn could steal from spring if October had leave to go a-maying in some Olympian masquerade of melody and sunlight;

to write passages very much like parts of rhetorical sonnets. Time after time his prose, especially in *Blake*, struggles to be metrical, but remains agitated and dishevelled prose. The hand which was loose on blank verse and the heroic couplet, was no sterner on prose, which offers still less incitement to control. The formal sentence was perhaps a kind of feeling after a stanza in prose, but it was inadequate. In short passages it could, even to the last, be magnificent in compliment, contumely or humour, and when he set himself to pronounce eulogies of nine dramatists of Shakespeare's age in turn his performance was admirable as well as astonishing.

His style is meant for public oration. Even so, it has in it too many of the elements of debate. It is restless in readiness for attack. It could not live without comparison, and comparison involved the most truculent disparagement of someone, of Euripides, Byron, Carlyle, or *Margites* Hallam, or praise, too general, and too much like flattery, of someone else, of Landor or Victor Hugo. It never means a jot more than it says, and by such a style "when all is done that can be done then all is done in vain." It makes no background for itself and no atmosphere, being hard and gleaming and mechanical.

Swinburne had a singular knowledge of books, because it was not mere learning but a violent passion; he was a voluptuary in books, and had been free to indulge himself in the princely library of his relative, Lord Ashburnham; and yet all he could do was to flatter or abuse them. Seldom could he expose their qualities, never his own feeling for them, without belabouring them with praise. In criticism he makes laws and pronounces judgments; nor has he more mercy for books than for men, whom he could condemn to "lifelong seclusion from intercourse with the humanity they dishonour" as "the irreducible minimum of the penalty demanded rather than deserved by their crimes." He is best at loyal flattery in verse: probably no other

poet has written so much poetry about books and writers.

The study of Blake and many scattered opinions and points of textual criticism, must be long connected with Swinburne's name. Oblivion, and for the first time peace, must be the end for most of his prose, with all its passion for literature, for what is beautiful and brave and generous in men and women, with all its eloquence and subtlety.

When he talked his prose the power of it was undeniable. He talked much as he wrote, but added his own priceless excitement of enthusiasm or indignation. Mr. Gosse thinks his "mock irascibility" and pleasure in fighting "deliberately modelled on the behaviour of Walter Savage Landor"; but Swinburne's size, something between a third and a half of Landor's, must have established a new variety. Mr. Gosse recalls part of a typical conversation in which Swinburne, in 1875, was indulging this irascibility towards someone absent and unnamed:

> He had better be careful. If I am obliged to take the cudgel in my hand the rafter of the hovel in which he skulks and sniggers shall ring with the loudest whacks ever administered in discipline or chastisement to a howling churl.

After a slow beginning the words were poured

forth in rapid exultation "in towering high spirits, without a moment's pause to find a word." So powerful was his temperament that he read *Bothwell*, a double-length chronicle play, aloud to Burne-Jones, O'Shaugnessy, P. B. Marston, and Mr. Gosse, without giving any recorded cause for complaint. Even Ruskin bowed down before the portent of this most extravagantly artistic being then upon the earth, remarking of course that he was "righter" than Swinburne, but "not his match." His spirit was extraordinary. At the age of fifty he would write, over the signature of "A Gladstonite," a letter to the St. James's Gazette, saying that he had observed a certain vagueness in the charges against the boycotters of the Primrose League, and giving this more definite instance:

> On the 1st of April—I will confine myself to the events of that single day—Mrs. Outis, of Medamothy, was shot dead in her carriage, while returning from a visit in the adjoining parish of Nusquam, by a masked assassin wearing a primrose in his buttonhole. . . .

The anonymity was unmasked by the editor. Near the end of his life he wrote to The Times protesting against "the unsolicited adulation of such insult" as his inclusion in that "unimaginable gathering," the British Academy. In all things he is said to have been extreme. When he had left a dull meeting a noise broke in upon

the dullness from outside, which proved on inquiry to be Swinburne dancing upon some scores of silk hats by way of revenge for that part of the dullness which he had endured. Once, it is said, he amazed and delighted a dinner party with his conversation and reappeared the following day to apologize for having forgotten the invitation. Many stories of uncertain historic and natural-historic value are told which await the imprint of official biography, such as that one relating how a Belgian poet, going to pay his respects to the great Englishman, had to ring at the door many times before it was opened by Swinburne himself; he was in his shirt which displayed his chest covered with blood, the result, as it turned out, on anxious questioning, of a romp with his cat. In other ways he has been reported "constitutionally unfitted to shine in mixed society." The gentlest of his passions seems to have been for babies, whom he worshipped on his knees and was "very fantastic over." In every way he acknowledged the possession of "the infinite blessing of life," "the fervour of vital blood," which made him, as he said of Blake, "a man perfect in his way, and beautifully unfit for walking in the way of any other man," an extraordinary man, and yet fundamentally a "healthy-minded and reasonable" one. He made friends of other men with

this possession. Like Shelley, he was, as he said, fortunate in his friends, chiefly artists and poets like the Rossettis, Morris, Burne-Jones, Bell Scott, Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, Mr. Edmund Gosse, but ranging in type from the saintly Christina Rossetti to the "unsaintly" Sir Richard Burton, who called him his only beloved son in whom he was well pleased.

VI

SONGS OF TWO NATIONS
SONGS BEFORE SUNRISE

ALREADY by his verses on Landor and Hugo, and his songs *In Time of Order* and *In Time of Revolution*, Swinburne had shown that if Love and Sin were a passion with him, they were not an exclusive obsession. In the very year after *Poems and Ballads*, his *Song of Italy*, dedicated to Mazzini, proved that he had another passion. Dolores moved him to no such tremorous emotion as he gave to the words of Freedom addressing Italy:

> Because men wept, saying *Freedom*, knowing of thee,
> Child, that thou wast not free. . . .

no such worship as he offered Mazzini, then in despair at the unsuccess of Garibaldi and the humiliating generosity of Napoleon:

> Thy children, even thy people thou hast made,
> Thine, with thy words arrayed,
> Clothed with thy thoughts and girt with thy desires;
> Yearn up toward thee as fires.

Art thou not father, O father, of all these?
From thine own Genoese
To where of nights the lower extreme lagune
Feels its Venetian moon,
Nor suckling's mouth nor mother's breast set free
But hath that grace through thee. . . .

His *Oblation* could not but have been mistaken for a love poem to a woman had it appeared in another of his books, though a nation seems a more natural recipient than a woman of the other kind of love poem, forty stanzas long. Swinburne had never a better excuse for repetition and for progress by addition, than in the doxology where he bids the winds and all things, and one by one the cities of Italy, praise Mazzini, "the fair clear supreme spirit without stain." If there be such a thing as religious poetry, this is religious, ending in hopes for "a bloodless and a bondless world," Freedom and the "fair republic," an earth "kingdomless," "throneless," "chainless."

The theme of *A Song of Italy* is magnificent; the poet's mood of grave sweetness and a kind of dark joyfulness is worthy of it, and is above thinking too much of priests and kings, "creeds and crimes"; his words and rhythms have a religious sensuousness. But it is a poem that ought not to be read, as most often it has to be, dispassionately in a study, instead of being chanted by some impersonal priest or priestess.

So chanted, the rhythm, the majestic images and words—hardly a word is used without suggesting either sublimity of hope and sorrow, or sharply contrasted qualities—should be comparable for effect to the greatest passages of a religious service, that is among those for whom Freedom and Italy mean something spiritually vast. Freedom saying:

> Though God forget thee, I will not forget . . . ;

the "hundred cities' mouths in one" praising the "supreme son" of Italy; the poet bidding her

> Let not one tongue of theirs who hate thee say
> That thou wast even as they. . . .

these should make a joyful and noble sound in any temple of Liberty or Fraternity.

At present there is no such temple. The poem must be read by isolated citizens of the world in places which *A Song of Italy* will not convert into temples. There the words will at least gain nothing by the reverberation which they might so well set up amongst a multitude assembled. Closer and quieter inspection will reveal a hundred beautiful things, and an even grace, a thrilling purity, hardly to be found in any other poem of Swinburne's. At no point is it lacking in dignity and fairness. But the

whole is not equal to the sum of the admirable parts. To have been as great as its aim, it should have been more than equal. It does not justify its length by a pervading, continuous and accumulating passion, which could absorb until a second or third reading the pleasure of

> O chosen, O pure and just,
> Who counted for a small thing life's estate,
> And died and made it great. . . .

of

> This is that very Italy which was
> And is and shall not pass.

Whether all these clear beauties would count were the song publicly declaimed can hardly be imagined. In private reading they cannot be missed. They seem of too fine and delicate a kind for a structure of this magnitude. Neither is this delicate quality everywhere effectual. The opening, for example, is defaced by some of Swinburne's characteristic mixture of precision and obscurity, as when he sees

> the hours
> As maidens, and the days as labouring men,
> And the soft nights again
> As wearied women to their own souls wed,
> And ages as the dead.

In the doxology he gives way to the temptation to appeal to such different things as winds,

light, storm, summer, shore, wave, skies, graves, hopes, memories, years, sounds, sorrow, joy, human beings dead and alive. Therefore, when he comes to "dews and rains" it is hardly possible not to be impatient of what is so like in its weakness and so unlike in its strength to the great original, "O all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever." Swinburne sacrifices the regularity of the original, but takes only a licentious and occasional freedom. The objects addressed, of very different classes, are multiplied to excess; and some are treated with a fancy natural to the poet, and both brilliant and appropriate, as in

> Red hills of flame, white Alps, green Apennines,
> Banners of blowing pines,
> Standards of stormy snows, flags of light leaves,
> Three wherewith Freedom weaves
> One ensign that once woven and once unfurled
> Makes day of all a world,
> Makes blind their eyes who knew not, and outbraves
> The waste of iron waves. . . .

It is a fancy that helps to undermine the structure both of the whole and of the doxological portion, though it adds to the pleasures by the way. Thus the poem is the work of Swinburne partly as an isolated lyrist and partly also as a national, public, or social poet. His attempt to make the two one was glorious; but

whether any modern poet whatever could have succeeded in it or in any similar one is doubtful. If any has done, it is Tennyson in his Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington, and perhaps Whitman; but then Whitman is the intimate and equal of everything and everyone in his poetry, writing of what he has touched and understood, moving freely and cheerfully in and out. Swinburne seems to be definitely assuming a part; he has come from outside to celebrate men and events of which I cannot feel that he was the equal, save in ardour, and this ardour has a certain thinness and shrillness. When he had to call up city after city to praise Mazzini, only a manly grasp of reality could have saved him from the too "poetical" style in which differentiation was impossible; so to this he gave way. His task was a more difficult one than Shelley's, who, in the *Ode to Naples*, for example, is a solitary man expressing private imaginings which must succeed or fail with very little help from actual events and places. Swinburne, surrendering himself and his personality, appeals to us, as it were, with an impersonation of Freedom, Italy, Rome: he was in a public capacity, his poem was addressed to a public man, and to the general eye and ear. He personified Italy and Freedom and gave them words to utter: he used as a model a poem which was

not private, nor the work of an isolated man. His song, with all its fire, grace, and strength, falls short only of a kind of perfection which no private stranger with one lyric impulse, howsoever divine, could possibly achieve.

Freedom and revolution aiming at freedom had come to mean for Swinburne something very much what light and the sea meant. His early *Song in Time of Order* shows him in a mood like that which sent Byron and Landor and Tennyson towards real fighting. The song is sung at the launching of a boat to carry the lovers of freedom out to sea, away from a land ruled by a king:

> Out to the sea with her there,
> Out with her over the sand,
> Let the kings keep the earth for their share!
> We have done with the sharers of land.

There are but three of them, but "while three men hold together the kingdoms are less by three," and they rejoice in the rain in their hair and the foam on their lips. This eagerness was in the spirit of Byron's

> Yet Freedom, yet thy banner torn but flying
> Streams like a thunderstorm against the wind. . . .

and Shelley's

> Let there be light! said Liberty.

Putting behind him Dolores, Faustine, and

Felise, Swinburne dedicated to Freedom the little time given to men:

> A little time that we may fill
> Or with such good works or such ill
> As loose the bonds or make them strong
> Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
> By rose-hung river and light foot-rill
> There are who rest not; who think long
> Till they discern as from a hill
> At the sun's hour of morning song,
> Known of souls only, and those souls free,
> The sacred spaces of the sea.

But for the more than metaphorical relationship to light and the sea Swinburne's freedom might command our respect, but certainly not our attention throughout *Songs Before Sunrise* and his later poems. Unless his Freedom gains sublimity or lustre from the associations with eternal things it cannot but be held lightly after a time save by bigots. To those fighting in the cause of Italian unity the words "Freedom," "Liberty," and "Republic," may have had the same value as certain other words at religious revivals. These exalted values may or may not be false; it is certain that they do not give everlasting life to hymns or poems. It is not difficult to find verses where one of these words is used much as other words are used in hymns, as, for example, in *Tenebræ*, in the verse:

> There all chains are undone;
> Day there seems but as night;
> Spirit and sense are as one
> In the light not of star nor of sun;
> Liberty there is the light.

"Spirit and sense" gives no help. Swinburne's great admiration for Shakespeare's phrase, "spirit of sense," caused him to repeat and vary it beyond all reason both in prose and verse.

In *Quia Multum Amavit* Freedom speaks, calling itself first, "God, the spirit of man," and next, "Freedom, God and man," which is very much like popular poetical theology. Freedom is God and also "the spirit of earth," the "earth soul," the only God, in the poem to Whitman. Saluting her, as "God above all Gods" and "light above light, law beyond law," Swinburne declares himself to be her harp and her clarion, her storm thrush, having heard her and seen her coming before ever her wheels "divide the sky and sea." The *Marching Song* speaks of Freedom "whence all good things are." She is the "most holy one"—in *The Insurrection in Candia*—who will "cleanse earth of crime." He does not succeed in giving the word a high and distinct value by transferring to it a value more often connected with Jehovah or one of the other deities, though unconsciously from the context of aspiring and exulting words

it acquires a vaguely religious sense corresponding to that with which it thrills perhaps the majority of men, lovers of Shelley or not; and it may do more than this for men of any sect that responds at once to the sentiment of *A Year's Burden:*

> There should be no more wars nor kingdoms won. . . .

A man belonging to no sect must feel that here and on almost every page of *Songs Before Sunrise* Swinburne is either addressing a sect or starting one.

Throughout the book Swinburne applies Christian terms to his own purposes. Whatever Christians may feel, no one else can see more than a naïve and showy compliment in the end of the *Hymn to Man:*

> Glory to Man in the Highest! for Man is the master of things.

To say that "all men born are mortal, but not man," as he does in *The Pilgrims*, if ingenious, is nothing more, being a matter of words only. To compare men favourably with the gods, ancient and modern, is just, and can be both amusing and inspiriting, but assertion and asseveration is not beyond the strength of propagandists, though commonly they have not the solemn tones to pronounce for them, as in *On*

the Downs, that there is no God but man. The poet's abuse of God does not help the word when applied to man, as in *A Year's Burden:*

> Thy thought, thy word, O soul republican,
> O spirit of life, O God whose name is man:
> What sea of sorrows but thy sight shall span?
> Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Here nearly all Swinburne's favourite significant words are confused, inextricably if not sublimely. "Cry wellaway, but well befall the right" is repeated six times as a burden to the verses, and the poetical "wellaway," especially in a burden, first demands, and then at last almost creates, a sensuousness overpowering words like "republican." Fortunately, these words are often overpowered and reduced to the value of their sounds. It would be pedantic and a proof of viperish deafness to inquire into the verse of *Siena* for example:

> Let there be light, O Italy!
> For our feet falter in the night.
> O lamp of living years to be,
> O light of God, let there be light!
> Fill with a love keener than flame
> Men sealed in spirit with thy name,
> The cities and the Roman skies.

Light is everywhere in *Songs Before Sunrise*, the light of the sun and the light of Swinburne's

light-loving spirit, as in the end of *On the Downs:*

> And the sun smote the clouds and slew,
> And from the sun the sea's breath blew,
> And white waves laughed and turned and fled
> The long green heaving seafield through,
> And on them overheard
> The sky burnt red. . . .

Possibly this end would gain were "time's deep dawn" to have a spiritual meaning both clear and powerful: certainly it is too closely allied to the splendour of the physical sun to fail of being poetry. Many poems like the *Eve of Revolution* are saved from simple dullness by the actual and figurative presence of "the four winds of the world," and by that metrical energy which is not unworthy of wind and sun. Poem after poem is worth much or nothing according as the reader can take the first line or verse as a keynote and then allow the metre to sing, with occasional guidance from the words "light," "men," "sea," "thundering," "sleep," "weep," "sword," "grave," "time," "crown," etc. Not that they are to be regarded as majestic nonsense rhymes, for they treat grave matters gravely and grammatically. But the writer trusts more than usual to his metre and his rhymes; the interspaces are filled more loosely with words. This looseness is guided by rules

of sound, but sometimes of dignity. Thus where Browning sings:

> Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup;

Swinburne says in *The Insurrection in Candia:*

> Let wine be far from the mouth.

In his *Marching Song* the singers have with them the morning star, the dayspring—"even all the fresh daysprings"—and "all the multitude of things," also winds, fountains, mountains, and not the moon but the mist which lies in the valley, "muffled from the moon," also highlands and lowlands, and sea bays, shoals, islands, cliffs, fields, rivers, grass, haze, and not the hills but the peace "at heart of hills," also all sights and sounds, all lights, also the nightingale, and "the heart and secret of the worldly tale." The point is that Swinburne writes in such a manner that the feebleness of the last phrase does not tell against him but is absorbed, contributing to the whole a certain cadence and the rhyme "ale." It is not absurd for Swinburne to make Spain speak of her "sins and sons" being dispersed through sinless lands: it is not out of key, and does not prevent us from admiring the words that follow, to describe how those sins made the name of man accursed, that of God thrice accursed.

Two pages afterwards Switzerland speaks of

"snows and souls," considerably lowering the value of "souls" for the plodding reader, who is not blinded by the pomp of the Litany. Even the reader too wise to plod is not content with a trick, such as that in "before any world had any light," when it is repeated as this is three times within seven verses (*Genesis*); but he will recognize too that the parallelism of

> Slowlier than life into breath,
> Surelier than time into death. . . .

in *To Walt Whitman in America* had never so consistent a setting in prose or poetry before Swinburne's time. At its best this style makes its own terms, and often in long series of lines, beginning perhaps with the same word, "By" or "Ah," as like one another as wave to wave, the verse advances magnificently, in stateliness, or turbulence, or eager speed. There is no other poetry where the substance is so subdued to the musical form of verse. It is not thought set to music, but music which has absorbed thought. Far less than Shelley's will it permit paraphrase. By comparison, the *Ode to Liberty* is massive with thought and history, and the rhyme seems a fortunate accident. In *The Song of the Standard*, in *Hertha*, in *Monotones*, in *Messidor*, in *Tenebræ*, in *A Watch of the Night*, for example, the metre and rhyme make of each verse a spiritual being that never existed

before, and has no existence except when evoked by an exact repetition of each word. Where the thought demands separate attention it fails, as in the verse which asks to be visualized, and cannot, in *On the Downs:*

> As a queen taken and stripped and bound
> Sat earth discoloured and discrowned;
> As a king's palace empty and dead
> The sky was, without light or sound,
> And on the summer's head
> Were ashes shed.

The relative positions of earth, sky, and summer can be settled by no diplomacy. Sometimes even an indiscretion refuses to sink out of sight in the music, as in *Quia Multum Amavit,* when "lordly" is applied to "laughter" on one page as a word of credit, and on the next "lies and lords" are handcuffed together. The vague is not of necessity unfriendly, but a line in *Tiresias* like

> Order of things, and rule and guiding song

is apt to detach itself. There is also a large class of comparisons, such as "A sound sublimer than the heavens are high," which are pretentious and under no circumstances effectual: the constant figurative use of "clothe" has no force. Even verbosity can seem a vice when it makes the line

> But heart there is not, tongue there is not found. . . .

And language is not even a beautiful disease in the lines:

> O thought illimitable and infinite heart
> Whose blood is life in limbs indissolute
> That still keeps hurtless thy invisible part
> And inextirpable thy viewless root. . . .

The risks run in this adventure were great; it is not wonderful that they proved sometimes too great. That a volume coming only a few years after *Poems and Ballads* should have been so fully consecrated to Liberty, using Love only for images of "bride" and "bridegroom" and the like, is alone a superb proof of the poet's devotion, but it is of small account when compared to the positive proofs—the splendour and variety of metre and imagery, the ardour that changes and never abates.

In these same years Swinburne wrote other political poems which were printed with *A Song of Italy* in *Songs of Two Nations*. They include a long *Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic: September 4th, 1870*, and a number of sonnets concerning, among others, "the worm Napoleon." The ode shows that already he ran the danger of becoming poet laureate of Freedom, laboriously delirious. The sonnets made him conscious that perhaps "wrath embittered the sweet mouth of song." He had

not the same regard for himself as he had for Italy when he bade her

> Let not one tongue of theirs who hate thee say
> That thou wert even as they. . . .

The hissing, spitting, and cursing is the frantic abuse of a partisan, which is the worse and not the better for being done in the name of liberty. It is a dead relic of 1870, proving that Swinburne was not of Shelley's or Byron's stature. He speaks of "*our* blood" and "*our* tears," but the vomit is his own. His spirit is less that of Dante condemning men to Hell than of Judge Lynch. But the worst of these sonnets is that they will support any doubts of Swinburne's right and power to sing what he strove to sing in *Songs Before Sunrise* and *Songs of Two Nations*, since it is almost incredible that the same man should have room for so much love of liberty as well as so much hate of Napoleon. Swinburne continued to hate Gods, priests and kings, though often with deep respect and love of Christ, even to the days of the South African War, when noble blood and patriotism swamped his love of Liberty without noticing it. He wrote a poem "for the feast of Giordano Bruno, philosopher and martyr," coupling his name with Lucretius, Sidney and Shelley, saying that surely his

"spirit of sense" had gone up to meet their spirits. He abused the Czar. He praised Kossuth. He wrote *Lines on the Monument of Giuseppe Mazzini*, once more saying that Mazzini was greater than his fellow-townsman Columbus. When the "shadows fallen of years were nine since heaven grew seven times more divine" at Mazzini's entry, Swinburne again addressed him—"as very Christ" but not "degraded into deity." The Saturday Review's opinion that, "as a matter of fact, no man living, or who ever lived—not Cæsar or Pericles, not Shakespeare or Michael Angelo—could confer honour more than he took on entering the House of Lords" moved him to write *Vos Deos Laudamus: The Conservative Journalist's National Anthem*, beginning:

O Lords our Gods . . .

Because "What England says her lords unsay" he wrote:

Clear the way my lords and lackeys!

and was not above reminding the lords, for the sake of readers of the Pall Mall Gazette, that:

Lust and falsehood, craft and traffic, precedent and gold,
Tongue of courtier, kiss of harlot, promise bought and sold,
Gave you heritage of empire over thralls of old.

Nell Gwynn had drawn a sonnet from him to *Our Lady of Laughter* and *Our Lady of Pity*,

but even she could not save the dukes from being reminded that they were:

> Graces by grace of such mothers
> As brightened the bed of King Charles. . . .
> Bright sons of sublime prostitution.

Landor's centenary reminded him of "Milton's white republic undefiled," and the fact that Song's "fires are quenched when Freedom's are." Of Landor he could still say:

> . . . Of all souls for all time glorious none
> Loved Freedom better, of all who have loved her best.

Still as in the days when Landor promised a money payment to the family of the first patriot to assert the dignity and fulfil the duty of tyrannicide, he could hail Felice Orsini with the double honours: "Patriot and Tyrannicide." An ode was addressed to Athens, showing that the Greeks were Swinburne's Gods:

> Gods for us are all your fathers, even the least of these are Gods. . . .

and yet he laughed at other "Creed-wrought faith of faithless souls that mock their doubts with creeds."

Of more recent Gods he went on praising Hugo, comparing him with Christ and Prometheus, and hailing him as King, comforter and prophet, Paraclete and poet, In 1882 on the

subject of the Russian persecution of Jews he appealed to Christ to know if it had not been his passion "to foreknow in death's worst hour the works of Christian men." The suggested Channel tunnel was to him a "pursy dream" of "vile vain greed," which could not link the two nations; nor could anything save "union only of trust and loving heart." King, priest, or God made no difference to his love of England any more than of Eton:

Where the footfall sounds of England, where the smile of England shines,
Rings the tread and laughs the face of freedom, fair as hope divines
Days to be, more brave than ours and lit by lordlier stars for signs.
All our past acclaims our future: Shakespeare's voice and Nelson's hand,
Milton's faith and Wordsworth's trust in this our chosen and chainless land,
Bear us witness: come the world against her, England yet shall stand.

The question of Home Rule for Ireland naturally, therefore, moved him to assert in *Astrophel* that

Three in one, but one in three,
God, who girt her with the sea,
Bade our Commonweal to be. . . .

The jubilee of 1887 earned from him a loyal poem which bade earth and sea join the "just

and sacred jubilation." When he was thirty England was "among the faded nations" because that was the conventional view of a republican. Patriotism destroyed his dreams as if they had never existed: foreign nations became "dark Muscovy reptile in rancour," "base Germany, blatant in guile"; the people became "blind ranks and bellowing votes"; Ireland was "murderous Ireland." He was inclined more and more to bestow the title of Cant on anything beyond a general love of liberty and justice. Thus in *Astrophel* he sang without a smile:

> Lovelier than thy seas are strong,
> Glorious Ireland, sword and song
> Gird and crown thee: none may wrong,
> Save thy sons alone.

Thus with a smile, in 1876, he sang in *A Ballad of Bulgarie:*

> The gentle knight, Sir John de Bright,
> (Of Brummageme was he,)
> Forth would he prance with lifted lance
> For love of Bulgarie.
> No lance in hand for other land
> Sir Bright would ever take;
> For wicked works, save those of Turks,
> No head of man would break;
> But that Bulgarie should not be free,
> This made his high heart quake. . . .

presumably also with a smile in 1889, about Parnell, in *A Ballad of Truthful Charles:*

Charles Stuart the crownless king whose hand
Sways Erin's sceptre—so they sing,
The bards of holy Liarland. . . .

Swinburne was then fifty-two. Both before and after this he gave reason to believe that accident had consecrated to Liberty, Love and Peace a nature that might have sung Tyranny, Hate and War with equal bigotry. It was not, however, permitted to him to go farther than to say first that the English are a people "that never at heart was not inly free," and are "the first of the races of men who behold unashamed the sun"; and second that "none but we . . . hear in heart the breathless bright watchword of the sea," and moreover that "never was man born free" on the other side of the Channel. Side by side with this strain ran that other of general hope:

See the light of manhood rise in the twilight of the Gods;

and:

Not for gain of heaven may man put away the rule of light.

The Englishman and the universal brother in Swinburne were entirely different and distinct, like soldier and priest. Hardly a second time did he find the grave mellow note of *Two Leaders* where he salutes two "prophets of past kind," "high souls that hate us," men whom

he thought reactionary children of night but honourable:

> Pass with the stars and leave us with the sun.

The note is worthy of Wordsworth or Tennyson at his best, but in Swinburne it seems almost an accident of temper, in a moment of freedom from the obsession of Liberty.

VII

LATER POEMS: CHARACTERISTICS

After *Songs Before Sunrise* and *Songs of Two Nations*, Liberty gave Swinburne little help towards the making of poetry. His poems in future were to be laid before many Gods, including Liberty, Love, and Sin, but Music before all. In 1878 appeared a second series of *Poems and Ballads*, in 1880 *Songs of the Springtides* and *Studies in Song*, in 1882 *Tristram of Lyonesse*, in 1883 *A Century of Roundels*, in 1884 *A Midsummer Holiday*, in 1894 *Astrophel*, in 1896 *The Tale of Balen*, in 1904 *A Channel Passage*. Except the two narratives, *Tristram* and *Balen*, none of these books was so much of a piece as *Songs Before Sunrise* or even as *Poems and Ballads: A Century of Roundels* comes nearest because all the poems are in similar forms.

Altogether, hardly any of our poets have written more short poems, save those like Herrick, who wrote many of only a few lines apiece. This multitude includes Latin, French, and border dialect poems, narratives, descrip-

tions, odes, poems of reflection and of passion and of both, and some translations. But the great variety of forms and subjects is no obstacle to one fairly clear but accidental division. On the one hand lie perhaps the only poems which have a distinguishable subject, those confessedly connected with a particular person, place, or event: these include the political poems, the poems relating to men, whether friends or great men, living and dead; and with these go the translations. On the other hand lie those poems which essentially exist in Swinburne's books or in the memories of his lovers and nowhere else, and have no important connection with anything outside—poems which at their best could not be paraphrased or abridged or represented by anything but themselves, which could hardly be thought of as better or worse than they are or in any way different.

The second class is superior to the first, because as a rule either Swinburne abated his style for the sake of things known to the world, or he made an unsuccessful attempt to envelop them in it. The best example of this failure is the poem entitled *A Channel Passage*, which is a travel sketch in verse, and never does more than remind us that the actual scene was one of uncommon magnificence. The poet calls the steamer a "steam-souled ship" and the same

translation of reality into poetry—to put it in a crude intelligible way—is the essence and the fatal fault of the poem. Whenever art allows a comparison with nature, wherever nature intrudes in her own purity and majesty, art fails. Uniformity of illusion is a condition of success. In *A Channel Passage* there is hardly any illusion: it is a man being poetical on a steamer, which is no less and no more absurd than being poetical in an omnibus; but being poetical is not poetry.

> Stern and prow plunged under, alternate: a glimpse, a recoil, a breath,
> As she sprang as the life in a god made man would spring at the throat of death. . . .

is a versification and rhetorical treatment of notes, whether in a pocket-book or not. The prose description of the same scene in *Essays and Studies* is brief and suggestive and humane. The poem is an inhuman perversion of language and metre.

The Lake of Gaube in the same volume is also founded upon an actual, perhaps a single, experience, with an entirely different result. The experience has been digested; the illusion is complete, and no comparison with the lake itself possible except as a late afterthought to those who know it; the same world, Swinburne's world, is with us from the first words, "The

sun is lord and god," until the last. Swinburne's style touches actual detail only at its peril. When he speaks of "one sweet glad hawthorn," a "dyke's trenched edge," "the steep sweet bank," and "the dense bright oval wall of box inwound," he can seldom avert the fatal comparison. It gives occasion for the just and cruel smile at the poet "turning beautiful things into poetry," as the world says. There are poets who can speak of "when the northering road faced westward" and "as the dawn leapt in at my casement," but Swinburne cannot. After them the various metrical forms of *Loch Torridon*, and the excited words, can do no more than show us a composition in an intermediate stage, between a memory and a poem. Lines like these:

> But never a roof for shelter
> And never a sign for guide
> Rose doubtful or visible. . . .

can be translated into prose, and have possibly been translated out of it—not into poetry.

One of the poems in the same volume approaching perfection within this class is *A Landscape by Courbet:*

Low lies the mere beneath the moorside, still
And glad of silence: down the wood sweeps clear
To the utmost verge where fed with many a rill
  Low lies the mere.

The wind speaks only summer: eye nor ear
Sees aught at all of dark, hears aught of shrill,
From sound or shadow felt or fancied here.

Strange, as we praise the dead man's might and skill,
Strange that harsh thoughts should make such heavy cheer,
While, clothed with peace by heaven's most gentle will,
Low lies the mere.

It is spoilt by the irrelevant "as we praise the dead man's might and skill," which introduces us to a group in a picture gallery.

Probably the finest of all the poems where Swinburne deals with a quite definite, tangible, well-known subject is the *Elegy 1869–1891*, on the death of Sir Richard Burton, though even here some must pause at "our demigod of daring," "the sovereign seeker of the world," and at other phrases that might seem only exaggerations of rhetoric. In it he seems to be half-way between a manly fleshly view of nature, of "the swordsman's hand, the crested head," and a spiritual transfiguring view. Possibly the name "Burton" in the last verse is no gain. "Auvergne, Auvergne," however, which opens the poem, is of itself sufficiently unfamiliar, perhaps—the repetition gives it a slightly extra-natural value—and onwards from the first verse:

Auvergne, Auvergne, O wild and woeful land,
O glorious land and gracious, white as gleam
The stairs of heaven, black as a flameless brand,
Strange even as life, and stranger than a dream. . . .

there is, I suppose, scarcely any temptation to think of Auvergne apart from these massy stanzas. The poem is in every way a characteristic one. The "glorious" and "gracious," indefinite, complimentary, and excited epithets, duplicating sound and sense, and the one clear, small comparison to a "flameless brand," and the three others indefinitely sublime to "the stairs of heaven," and "life" and "a dream," could hardly be found in another poet. He begins by asking whether the earth would not remember this man if it could remember men at all. With him the poet had seen Auvergne, "the mountain stairs"

> More bright than vision, more than faith sublime,
> Strange as the light and darkness of the world. . . .

strange also, as he goes on to say, as night and morning, stars and sun. Somewhat rudely and obscurely, but forcibly, he makes a comparison between the effect of death on Burton, and dawn on the mountain, using a crude line of conventional type such as he now and then does affect:

> Whom fate forgets not nor shall fame forget.

There follow a number of stanzas where similar comparisons are made in such a way that the spiritual exalts the physical—an abyss,

"viewless even as time's," makes him "now dream how high the freed soul climbs" after death—until at length the mountains and the river are strange in a half Dantesque, half Ossianic manner. The vague—"past and monstrous things"—"deadlier things unseen"—plays a part. Everything is violent or extreme. In the mist the two men are blinded as a pilot with foam, and "shrouded as a corpse," and they go along ledges too narrow for wild goats and sit blinded over the abyss. The mist is "raging." The "grim black helpless heights" "scorn" the sun and "mock" the morning. The winds had "sins for wings." The river below suggests the river, soundless and viewless, in which the dead man is being borne according to some superstition which the poet rejected; and he turns in thought to the priests, "loud in lies," who will mock his dust with their religion. But the soul of the man is free, with eyes keener than the sun, and wings wider than the world. His scorn, too, was "deep and strong as death and life." The poet asks in what "illimitable, insuperable, infinite" space the soul will use its wings. He answers immediately that no dream or faith can tell us. But having said that this soul's flight had always been sunward, his mind turns to Sophocles and the garden of the sun, and the tree of wisdom growing in it which had

gone to make the sheaf "his strenuous spirit bound and stored aright." Still thinking of the sun he supposes a further advance of the soul "toward the dawn" after death—"the imperious soul's indomitable ascent." "But," he says, meaning perhaps that a thin "soul" is not recognizable as Burton:

> But not the soul whose labour knew not end—
> But not the swordsman's hand, the crested head. . . .

However much the Elegy tells us of Burton, one verse at least pictures the mind of the poet:

> We sons of east and west, ringed round with dreams,
> Bound fast with visions, girt about with fears,
> Live, trust and think by chance, while shadow seems
> Light, and the wind that wrecks a hand that steers.

This is the man to whom Burton's path through the world was beset with dangers that "coiled and curled" against him, who saw the waves of the mountains more "fierce and fluctuant" than the seas, and the steep-built town as a "fearless" town hailing and braving the heights, who felt the heights brighter than vision, sublimer than faith, strange as light, darkness, night, morning, stars and sun.

If Swinburne had written about Auvergne in prose, and apart from Burton, his description might well have differed from that of other men only in lucidity and vigour: it would probably

have differed a great deal from that in the Elegy. Memory and thought had been awakened and excited by Burton's death, and the ordinary values of things—the tourist value, for example—had been disturbed or destroyed. His recollections of the mountains ceased to be, if they ever had been, more or less large disintegrated fragments of the earth and became a region of the spiritual world, mingling with other mountains seen, read of, or imagined, coloured and changed by a hundred other images assembled at the passionate thought of death and of the past. He ceased to be a hard Victorian atheist; he was unveiled as a man who through his ancestors and through his own thought and fancy had entertained a multitude of the forms of death. Once this paroxysm of emotional thought had begun to enter the form of

> Auvergne, Auvergne, O wild and woeful land. . . .

the incalculable suggestions of rhythm began to enter and still further to convert the humorous and rational atheist. The result is, I believe, as accurate and real as a map or a guide-book, and that in spite of what, to another view, might seem words only, begotten of words.

Rhyme certainly acted upon Swinburne as a pill to purge ordinary responsibilities. He

became sensible to many of the values of words, ancient and modern, ordinary and figurative, etymological and melodic. Thus he played with the literal meaning of Gautier's Christian name, Théophile: "Dear to God," he said, and went on to speak of the God that gives men "spirit of song." Thus he played with the name of Cape Wrath:

> But north of the headland whose name is Wrath, by the wrath or the ruth of the sea. . . .

Another form of play is noticeable in:

> Enmeshed intolerably in the intolerant net,

and still more in:

> And in the soul within the sense began
> The manlike passion of a godlike man,
> And in the sense within the soul again
> Thoughts that made men of gods and gods of men.

This may turn out to be very nearly nonsense; but certainly it fills a place harmoniously in *Thalassius*, a poem which is not nonsense. The line before it is an example of another kind of play with words. Instead of saying "the nightingale" he says "the singing bird whose song calls night by name"; a thing "eight hundred years old" is one "that has seen decline eight hundred waxing and waning years." Speaking of himself and others who read Tennyson in their teens, he says that it was

"ere time in the rounding rhyme of choral seasons had hailed us men," which is more than mere periphrasis. The next line but one contains an example of a kind of play which surprises us by making perfect sense:

Life more bright than the breathless light of soundless moon
in a songless glen.

Its perfect sense is, I think, not more important than its pattern, which is of a kind that seems instantly to forbid examination save by the ear. Another very old game played all through Swinburne's books is that with the phrase "spirit of sense." In one example, just given, the play is with soul and sense: sometimes the two are a line apart, sometimes combined as by Shakespeare, sometimes in the form of "spirit in sense," sometimes as "spirit and sense." Mademoiselle de Maupin was "the golden book of spirit and sense." The play of alliteration needs no example, except one which shows at the same time another variety of "spirit of sense," and how the long line was yet another aid to Swinburne's redemption from responsibility:

And now that the rage of thy rapture is satiate with revel and
ravin and spoil of the snow,
And the branches it brightened are broken, and shattered
the treetops that only thy wrath could lay low,
How should not thy lovers rejoice in thee, leader and lord of
the year that exults to be born,

So strong in thy strength and so glad of thy gladness whose
laughter puts winter and sorrow to scorn?
Thou hast shaken the snows from thy wings, and the frost
on thy forehead is molten; thy lips are aglow
As a lover's that kindle with kissing, and earth, with her
raiment and tresses yet wasted and torn,
Takes breath as she smiles in the grasp of thy passion to feel
through her spirit the sense of thee flow.

Here the rhythm should subdue curiosity: if it does not, *March: An Ode* will fail, since there is nothing but rhythm, the descriptions and even the form of the sentences being often imperfectly harmonious with the rhythm, and no serious aspirant will be satisfied with the amount of sense in:

For the breath of thy lips is freedom, and freedom's the
sense of thy spirit, the sound of thy song,
Glad god of the north-east wind, whose heart is as high as
the hands of thy kingdom are strong. . . .

It is important to notice that verse permits the poet to use "the hands of thy kingdom" and a thousand other aids to length and opacity. Thus in *Ex Voto* he thinks of his "last hour" —he personifies it vaguely—and how she will kiss him.

The cold last kiss and fold
Close round my limbs her cold
Soft shade as raiment rolled
And leave them lying.

It bears analysis, but, except to lovers of the

rhymes and this stanza form, must seem long-winded. Rhyme and the stanza excuse him when he pictures England not only with :

> The sea-coast round her like a mantle,

but with :

> The sea-cloud like a crown.

This would be a grave weakness in a poet who encouraged reading closely with eye and ear. In the next stanza of the same poem, *The Commonweal,* the rhyme "deathless" leads him to speak of "the breathless bright watchword of the sea." This is extraordinarily near nonsense, almost a bull's-eye. He is speaking of Englishmen bearing "in heart" this watchword, "breathless" means perhaps silent or inner, and "bright" is complimentary: but it is a near thing. Swinburne is usually privileged when singing of the sea, for it can mean the wild sea water, or the spirit of the sea which is freedom, or the mother of Venus. Therefore, when Swinburne tells us that England loves light for the sake of light, and truth for the sake of truth, but song for the sake of the sea as well as of song, we acknowledge the inseparableness of song and sea.

Sometimes the god of rhyme leads him to un-English writing, as when he speaks of September, the month of the proclamation in 1870

of the French Republic, as "Having only the name of honour, only sign of white." Hardly more English are some of the Biblical phrases, like "the strengths of the storm of them"; but they provided pairs of short syllables where such were wanted.

Lengthiness through reduplication or multiplication needs hardly an example, except perhaps in the class of comparisons. In the two first cases one comparison is seen provoking another in almost merry mood:

The sea was not lovelier than here was the land, nor the night than the day, nor the day than the night. . . .

So again, light at moonrise is lapped in gloom,

Even as life with death, and fame with time, and memory with the tomb
Where a dead man hath for vassals Fame the serf and Time the slave.

In this third case comparisons lead out of comparisons in a tangled network which helps to hide from some readers that lizards are the subjects of all the lines but the first:

Flowers dense and keen as midnight stars aflame
And living things of light like flames in flower
That glance and flash as though no hand might tame
Lightnings whose life outshone their stormlit hour
And played and laughed on earth, with all their power
Gone, and with all their joy of life made long
And harmless as the lightning life of song,
Shine sweet like stars when darkness feels them strong.

The lizards are compared to lightnings, which are then compared to song; and finally flowers and lizards are compared to stars: the stanza is thus filled with words of light and movement. Sometimes the comparisons overwhelm the subject of them, that is, for a reader disobedient to the command of sound and metre and the suggestiveness which they ordain. *An Autumn Vision*, for example, includes a storm which is thus exalted by a complexity of abstract comparisons which is almost maddening to the soberly inquiring intelligence:

As the darkness of thought and of passion is touched by the light that gives
Life deathless as love from the depth of a spirit that sees and lives,
From the soul of a seer and a singer, wherein as a scroll unfurled
Lies open the scripture of light and of darkness, the word of the world,
So, shapeless and measureless, lurid as anguish and haggard as crime,
Pale as the front of oblivion and dark as the heart of time,
The wild wan heaven at its height was assailed, and subdued and made
More fair than the skies that know not of storm and endure not shade.

Comparisons, like these, which either combine or confuse the physical and the spiritual world, are numerous and intensely characteristic in Swinburne: he would not be anything like what

he is without his lands "lonelier than ruin," his seas "stranger than death," his land of "sand and ruin and gold," his friend's laughter that was as kind "as love or sleep."

Akin to the comparisons are the lightly made personifications as of England, of the "last hour" in *Ex Voto*, of defeat and ruin, here:

Wherein defeat weds ruin, and takes for bride-bed France,

and of hope here:

And hope fell sick with famine for the food of change.

How ready we are for personification, *Poems and Ballads* proved by the poem where the Ballad is bidden to go with flowers to his lady, who shall kiss him in several places:

Ballad, and on thy mouth.

There the personification is really lost in embodiment: the ballad becomes a boy. As a rule there is no embodiment of "hope" that "sets wide the door," nor of empire, when "confounded empire cowers," and so on; and we accept it as indolently as perhaps it was offered. It is part of the roughness of Swinburne's as of other styles: what is necessary is that these elements shall be absorbed into the spiritual substance of words, as, for example, the witch is in this beautiful verse from *By the North Sea:*

Far flickers the light of the swallows,
Far flutters the weft of the grass,
Spun dense over desolate hollows
More pale than the clouds as they pass:
Thick woven as the weft of a witch is
Round the heart of a thrall that has sinned
Where youth and the wrecks of its riches
Are waifs on the wind.

There the grass flutters as the swallow flickers, and the earth becomes light and hollow under us.

Some vagueness and some cheapness exist where words so abound; where three words have to do the work of one, there can seldom be any fineness of single words or short phrases, and at times the sea will be called "divine" and "deathless," and so on, and things will be "heavenly," "strong as life," "sublime as death," and so on. But more noticeable than the vagueness is the violence and extravagance. The dawn springs like a panther "with fierce and fire-fledged wings" upon the lava-black land of Auvergne. A tiger used for comparison in *Thalassius* is

Drunk with trampling of the murderous must
That soaks and stains the tortuous close-coiled wood
Made monstrous with its myriad-mustering brood.

This is like the dream tiger of a child mad with fear, and as superhuman as Dolores: with the panther in *Laus Veneris*, which has a "hot, sweet throat," it might almost have come

from the days when the palm tree languished for its mate, and the viper and the lamprey most strangely loved. The child in *Thalassius* feels the thunder and the lightning as atrociously as he dreamed of the tiger—he was "half distraught with strong delight" while the heavens were "alive and mad with glory and angry joy." Of a quieter but equal extremity is the phrase "inlaid as with rose" which is used of a beaker "left divine" by the lips of Dione at a feast on Olympus, and the statement that the sun does not light the Channel Islands like Victor Hugo's fame, or that Tennyson (who died with Cymbeline open beside him) was led from earthward to sunward, "guided by Imogen," which Swinburne cannot have believed. So Gautier's tomb was a "golden tomb," and Bath was "like a queen enchanted who may not laugh or weep." These things remind us that Swinburne had not only a splendid, vivid, exuberant nature, but a spendthrift and reckless one. He has defended himself in an interesting manner in the Dedicatory Epistle of his collected poems to Mr. Watts-Dunton:

> Not to you, or any other poet, nor indeed to the very humblest and simplest lover of poetry, will it seem incongruous or strange, suggestive of imperfect sympathy with life or inspiration from nature, that the very words

of Sappho should be heard and recognized in the notes of the nightingales, the glory of the presence of dead poets imagined in the presence of the glory of the sky, the lustre of their advent and their passage felt visible as in vision on the live and limpid floorwork of the cloudless and sunset-coloured sea. The half-brained creature to whom books are other than living things may see with the eye of a bat and draw with the fingers of a mole his dullard's distinction between books and life: those who live the fuller life of a higher animal than he know that books are to poets as much part of that life as pictures are to painters, or as music is to musicians, dead matter though they may be to the spiritually stillborn children of dirt and dullness, who find it possible and natural to live while dead in heart and brain. Marlowe and Shakespeare, Æschylus and Sappho, do not for us live only on the dusty shelves of libraries.

It is excellently said, and necessary; but perhaps Swinburne was unaware that poets and their poetry entered more directly into his work than into other poets', that Landor, Hugo, Milton, Shelley and Marlowe took a place in it which Virgil did not in Dante's or Tennyson's, which Spenser or Chapman did not in Keats', or Shelley in Browning's. To give one example, he quotes from Landor: "We are what suns and winds and water make us," and on that text preaches the sonnet beginning:

Sea, wind, and sun, with light and sound and breath
The spirit of man fulfilling—these create
That joy wherewith man's life grown passionate
Gains heart to hear, and sense to read and faith

To know the secret word our Mother saith
In silence, and to see, though doubt wax great,
Death as the shadow cast by life on fate,
Passing, whose shade we call the shadow of death. . . .

As he was called the "seamew" in childhood, so he often wrote of himself as one with more than fondness, and of the sea as his "mother" with more than gravity. It was an old-fashioned name for the relation, but it meant more than the name meant elsewhere and has its effect. So also with the sun and the light, whose names are repeated with strange frequency in his last book of poems. The *Prologue to Dr. Faustus* is full of light, bright, fire, lightning; on the first page of *The Afterglow of Shakespeare*, "light" occurs three times, "lighten" twice, "sunlight" once, along with "fire," "shone," "shine," "bright," "brighter," "flame" and "lustrous"; the last words of the book are:

While darkness on earth is unbroken,
Light lives on the sea.

and the last in *Poems and Ballads* were:

With stars and sea winds in her raiment,
Night sinks on the sea.

That light and that sea have a beauty of spiritual, and, as some would say, symbolical, significance.

And yet when Swinburne was writing *A Swimmer's Dream* the rhyme of water appears to have sent him off to Love, who was "the sea's

own daughter." It is one of his most beautiful poems, and to have overcome the effect of that abrupt change in the third line :

> Dawn is dim in the dark soft water,
> Soft and passionate, dark and sweet.
> Love's own self was the deep sea's daughter. . . .

was a consummate labour of suggestive music. I will give one more example of a sacrifice to rhyme, where Swinburne translates Wordsworth's lines :

> I've heard of hearts unkind kind deeds
> With coldness still returning ;
> Alas ! the gratitude of men
> Hath oftener left me mourning.

into this verse :

> The poet high and hoary
> Of meres that mountains bind
> Felt his great heart more often
> Yearn, and his proud strength soften
> From stern to tenderer mood,
> At thought of gratitude
> Shown than of song or story
> He heard of hearts unkind.

It was not for this that rhyme and metre were evolved.

VIII

LATER POEMS: RESULTS

Such a lover of words and music could only spend his full powers on poems which essentially exist in his books or in the memories of his lovers, and nowhere else, having no important connection with anything outside. Sometimes, as in the *Elegy on Sir Richard Burton*, he triumphed with a distinguishable subject; but his best work is where he makes no overt appeal to our interest or sympathy, though the richer we are in the love of life and of words the greater will be our pleasure. The same is true of all poets, but not in this degree. For it may be said of most poets that they love men and Nature more than words; of Swinburne that he loved them equally. Other poets tend towards a grace and glory of words as of human speech perfected and made divine, Swinburne towards a musical jargon that includes human snatches, but is not and never could be speech. Yet it must never be forgotten that this jargon was no arbitrary novel language,

no mere anarchic tumult of words. It was the medium evolved out of human speech and literature by a man who was lovable and admirable to many of his finest contemporaries ; that it was at least as natural as any other medium is shown by the fact that in a five-mile walk he would think out a poem down to the last line and syllable without touching paper and then join a luncheon party and be companionable and witty, full of interest in the newspapers and topics of the day. In these witty moods he was able also to turn round and look upon his own jargon, parodying it and its content completely, thus:

Surely no spirit or sense of a soul that was soft to the spirit
and soul of our senses
Sweetens the stress of suspiring suspicion that sobs in the
semblance and sound of a sigh;
Only this oracle opens Olympian, in mystical moods and
triangular tenses—
"Life is the lust of a lamp for the light that is dark till the
dawn of the day when we die."
Mild is the mirk and monotonous music of memory, melodi-
ously mute as it may be,
While the hope in the heart of the hero is bruised by the
breach of men's rapiers, resigned to the rod;
Made meek as a mother whose bosom-beats bound with the
bliss-bringing bulk of a balm-breathing baby,
As they grope through the graveyard of creeds, under skies
growing green at a groan for the grimness of God,
Blank is the book of his bounty beholden of old, and its
binding is blacker than bluer:

Out of blue into black is the scheme of the skies, and their dews are the wine of the bloodshed of things;
Till the darkling desire of delight shall be free as a fawn that is freed from the fangs that pursue her,
Till the heart-beats of hell shall be hushed by a hymn from the hunt that has harried the kennel of kings.

He parodied himself, Tennyson, Browning, Whitman, Patmore, Owen Meredith, and Rossetti, and succeeded in being funnier than them all. It is greatly to be lamented that he never fulfilled his intention of writing the diary of Mrs. Samuel Pepys, kept concurrently with her husband's.

He said himself of his own work in the Dedication to *Collected Poems* that his medium or material had "more in common with a musician's than with a sculptor's." Hence we accept from him combinations far more astonishing under analysis than those which Dr. Johnson condemned in Lycidas. We accept them, for example, in the *Ave Atque Vale.* A volume might well and profitably be written upon this poem which, compared to Tennyson's Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington or even to Adonais, is like an Elizabethan "Bestiary" compared to a modern "Natural History." How simple and natural in comparison are Baudelaire's own words quoted at the head of the poem, about the poor dead, suffering when the October winds blow melancholy among the

tombs and feeling the ingratitude of living men! He begins:

> Shall I strew on thee rose or rue or laurel,
> Brother, on this that was the veil of thee?
> Or quiet sea-flower moulded by the sea,
> Or simplest growth of meadow-sweet or sorrel,
> Such as the summer-sleepy Dryads weave,
> Waked up by snow-soft sudden rains at eve?
> Or wilt thou rather, as on earth before,
> Half-faded fiery blossoms, pale with heat
> And full of bitter summer, but more sweet
> To thee than gleanings of a northern shore
> Trod by no tropic feet?

It is the simplest of the eighteen verses, and, after hesitating over those beautiful Dryads in the two lines nearest to magic in Swinburne, sets the tune of the whole. No man, I suppose, can be "all ear" to a poem; he must stray a little now and then to think, apart from the tune. If it were possible never thus to stray in reading or hearing, *Ave Atque Vale* would seem a perfect poem. Compounded of different elements arising from regret and inquiry, it makes out of Nature and poetry, fancy, superstition, mythology, and truth, a perfect tune, rich, sorrowful, and beautiful. I cannot pretend to explain it. But I know that the sound and the sense of the first line seem to prepare for it all and to make almost impossible a false curiosity; the "sea-flower moulded by the sea" lulls a

little more, so does the rhyme of "sorrel" and "laurel"; so, far more, do all those long-vowelled endings of thee, sea, weave, eve, heat, sweet, feet, before, and shore. "Half faded" is ever so little disturbing if I allow it to combine too closely with the blossoms and to produce actually half-faded flowers instead of fiery ones to which are added the idea and the sound of fading but not the fact. In the second verse Baudelaire's "flowers of evil" lead Swinburne to far lands and so to the sea, and in particular to the sea round "Lesbian promontories," and to the "barren" kiss of "piteous" wave with wave which is ignorant what "Leucadian grave" "hides too deep the supreme head of song": the sea, like Sappho's kisses, "salt and sterile," carries her hither and thither and vexes and works her wrong. Here, too, I do not too closely combine "barren" and "kiss," "piteous" and "wave," nor ask how waves could know where Sappho was lying, nor why she lies "too deep." "Salt" and "sterile" enter into the music to the extent of three syllables and, in the faintest manner, add to the effect of the "bitter" in the first stanza. So, later, in the phrase "effaced unprofitable eyes," "unprofitable" belongs to the whole and not to the eyes in particular: it is a faintly pervasive sound and feeling, like "poisonous," "luxurious,"

"tumultuous," "sleepless," "sombre," "mysterious," "sunless," "irrevocable," and the recurring "strange" and "bitter" and "sin." I confess that I pause when Swinburne speaks of laying on the tomb, Orestes-like, "a curl of severed hair." Now and then a thought will rise a little too far above the surface, as when the dead is once "a little dust," and again "wind and air." But having reached the last words—

> For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
> All waters as the shore,

I feel that there is more of death and the grave and a living man venturing among them than in any other poem except:

> Full fathom five thy father lies. . . .

and in some of the ballads. The poem is not a rational meditation, but the uncouth experience of death clothed in the strangest variety of words and ideas, which results in music rather than articulate speech. Perhaps no single sentence in the poem is unintelligible to the mind any more than it is ungrammatical. But the combination is one which the mind cannot judge, though it may approve, seeing the effect, and say that it is beyond her expectation or understanding.

Side by side with this may be taken *At a Month's End*, in the same book. It opens with

an interplay of sounds and words which might have preluded pure enchantment:

> The night last night was strange and shaken:
> More strange the change of you and me.
> Once more, for the old love's love forsaken,
> We went out once more toward the sea.
> For the old love's love-sake dead and buried,
> One last time, one more and no more. . . .

But it develops into a psychological study of two lovers in something like Browning's manner. The man is Swinburne, or at least a "light white sea-mew." His mistress is a "sleek black pantheress," a "queen of panthers" whose title calls for the rhyme of "anthers" later on, and the Browningesque tone which the rhyme denotes refuses to mingle with Swinburne's lyric ardour, ruining the piece as a study, making it seem a grotesquely poetical handling of fact. *Relics*, the solitary belated last successor of *Faustine* and *Felise*, is a failure of the same kind: it shows us an experience *plus* an attempt to use it in poetry. The other failures are the poems to Barry Cornwall, where rhyme and fancy are thrown as decorations over simple and sensible thoughts. But the successes in Swinburne's own richest style are many. One of them, "A Vision of Spring in Winter," is said to have been half composed in a dream, and the others have a similar faithful relation to something

which we do not quite recognize as reality. *The Year of the Rose*, for example, is full of:

> A music beginning of loves
> In the light that the roses made,
> Such light as the music loves,
> The music of man with maid.

The Last Oracle tempts by its sober appearance to a more careful reading than it ought to have if it is to succeed in making a grandeur of darkness out of which emerges the cry:

> O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
> Destroyer and healer, hear.

The sestina called *The Complaint of Lisa*, and the *Choriambics*, are two poems which give a perfect content to the form of sestina and choriambics. *The Ballad of François Villon* is a perfect ballad almost as saturated with colour and sense and humanity as *Ave Atque Vale*. *Before Sunset* is a melodious arrangement of words so sweet as to be almost wordless in effect. *At Parting* fits the idea "For a day or a night love sang to us, played with us" to a tune lasting for three verses of seven lines. *A Forsaken Garden* is nearly a successful attempt to turn the reality of a "steep square slope," fields that "fall southward," and a "dense hard passage," into the music of "all are at one now, roses and lovers." *Four Songs of Four Seasons* are similar attempts and less

successful, especially in the short lines of *Winter in Northumberland*, where the frequent rhymes, often of a comic sort, cause deafness to all else. Swinburne was often in later years to repeat this quality, a kind of joyless leaping and dancing of lifeless words, often a masque of simple facts or conceits in fancy dress. Rarely could he repeat anything like the quality of *Ave Atque Vale*. His translations from Villon make us wish that all the enthusiasm for Love and Sin of the sixties had left him a substance like Villon's.

Erectheus (1876), being after the same model, might have restored the glory of *Atalanta*. It may be a better play, as Swinburne thought it, but the style is too far gone in the Biblical, the classical and the un-English, too rich in phrases like "tongueless water-herds," "this holiness of Athens," "nor thine ear shall now my tongue invoke not," "a God intolerable to seamen," and "as a cloud is the face of his strength"; not to speak of the tendency marked in this:

> Drew seaward as with one wide wail of waves,
> Resorbed with reluctation; such a groan
> Rose from the fluctuant refluence of its ranks. . . .

and the confirmed trick shown in this:

> The whole world's crowning city crowned with thee
> As the sun's eye fulfils and crowns with sight
> The circling crown of heaven.

The blank verse is gracious everywhere and subtly varied, yet is in effect monotonous because it is uncontrolled and lacking in continuous form and purpose. Lacking these it cannot, except in the charge of some rare voice, hold us long either with its speed and mass or with the fullness of vowels in lines like these:

> Hear then and know why only of all men I
> That bring such news as mine is, I alone
> Must wash good words with weeping; I and thou,
> Woman, must wail to hear men sing, must groan
> To see their joy who love us. . . .

It is possible also to be tired of hearing laments over the fact that a girl is to die a maid. The movement of the chorus is always lovely or magnificent, but the words have not enough of any sensuous quality save sound to conceal a thinness of substance, a formality of style. On the stage it would have majesty: it offers perhaps the greatest possible opportunity for the extending of a perfect voice.

Studies in Song contains the fine endless poem in seven movements, called *By the North Sea*, dedicated to Walter Theodore Watts, now Theodore Watts-Dunton, with whom he had just gone to live at Putney. On examination this proves to mention many things which have sensuous properties, earth and sea and men and women, but though written after the poet had

become very deaf, it is sensuously powerful only in sound. The length and monotony help to conceal what lies below the sound and must, to some extent, enrich it: refusing to give way to the sound we may notice the verse:

> For the heart of the waters is cruel,
> And the kisses are dire of their lips,
> And their waves are as fire is to fuel
> To the strength of the sea-faring ships,
> Though the sea's eye gleam as a jewel
> To the sun's eye back as he dips.

Having noticed it we may question the value of the comparison in lines 3 and 4 save to provide "fuel," and we may be slow in perceiving that the waves are said to be as fire "though" now at sunset the sea is waveless and reflects as one jewel. We may notice, too, that oft-repeated thought that the border line "sundering death from life, keeps weariness from rest." Yet we may read the poem more than once without seeing Ulysses in it. We shall not gain by discovering him. The essence of the poem is:

> A land that is lonelier than ruin;
> A sea that is stranger than death.

That is the key. At the end the sun—"our father, the God"—is added to earth and sea, and the poet appears to bow down to it and to offer:

My dreams to the wind ever-living,
My song to the sea.

Sun and sea and poet make *Off shore* another complete and satisfactory poem: here, too, the sun is his "Father God" . . .

But thou art the God, and thy kingdom is heaven and thy shrine is the sea.

The forty stanzas are in praise of the light and the sea. Nothing is said unworthy of them: nothing remains in the memory of the forty stanzas save the light and the sea. The eight-hundred-line *Song for the Centenary of Walter Savage Landor* is not almighty sound, but reflection long drawn out through love of sound. Thus the sound makes the reflection tedious, and the reflection interferes with the sound, and the poem is a monument for patience. *Evening on the Broads* is another versified travel sketch which might seem more but for the intrusion of the fact: "Northward, lonely for miles, ere ever a village begin," which mars the music, and save in music it is not strong enough to endure the intrusion. *A Parting Song* (*to a friend leaving England for a year's residence in Australia*) reveals very clearly that Swinburne could imitate as well as parody himself, and that he could and would write beautifully on a broomstick. *The*

Emperor's Progress is interesting because it shows the poet condemning Nero's "heavy fair-faced hateful head," partly no doubt because Nero was an Emperor, partly because Swinburne had turned forty.

Songs of the Springtides, three long meditative lyrics and a longer birthday ode to Victor Hugo, belonging to the same year as *Studies in Song*, is one of the best of Swinburne's books, and in its original form one of the most pleasant to possess. It is also one of those in which he himself plays a conspicuous part. *Thalassius*, the first poem, appears to be an autobiographical poem of the same class as Shelley's Epipsychidion, and open to the charge brought by Swinburne against that poem, of containing riddles as well as mystery. The name Thalassius is presumably a variant of his boyish nickname "Sea-mew," and in the dedication to Trelawny he compares his book seeking favour of Shelley's friend to a "sea-mew on a sea-king's wrist alighting." The child is found in April, the poet's birth-month, on the sea shore. By an old warrior poet, a man like the sages in Shelley's *Prince Athanase* and *Laon and Cythna*, he is taught Liberty, Love, Hate, Hope, Fear ("fear to be worthless the dear love of the wind and sea that bred him fearless"): and in the end the old man blesses him:

Child of my sunlight and the sea, from birth
A fosterling and fugitive on earth;
Sleepless of soul as wind or wave or fire,
A man-child with an ungrown God's desire;
Because thou hast loved nought mortal more than me,
Thy father, and thy mother-hearted sea;
Because thou hast given thy flower and fire of youth
To feed men's hearts with visions, truer than truth;
Because thou hast kept in those world-wandering eyes
The light that makes one music of the skies;
Because thou hast heard with world-unwearied ears
The music that puts light into the spheres;
Have therefore in thine heart and in thy mouth
The sound of song that mingles north and south,
The song of all the winds that sing of me,
And in thy soul the sense of all the sea.

The whole poem is a dimly grandiose and luxuriant portrait-history of a poet's breeding. The human figure in it is not often more discernible than a figure in fire or cloud, and like such is easily lost. But it does not so much as Epipsychidion suggest questions and riddles, except to irrelevant or inessential curiosity. It should be read first of all Swinburne's poems both as showing his conception of himself, and, what is far more important, how inextricably mingled with nature and with words, how entangled and obscured by them, he really is, and how they modify his conception. Analysis proves the framework and the thought very simple; but the grandiose dimness is due to

no mere exaggeration or mist of words, but to a genuine, an insuperable sense of the mystery of simple things, and also a dissatisfaction with the debased simplicity of phrases like "He loved the sea." This is one of the longest of Swinburne's entirely successful pieces of music. Like *Ave Atque Vale* it is in a so-called iambic metre, resembling Lycidas in the rhyming and the occasional short lines, but more abundant both in rhymes and short lines. Its success illustrates the fact that his best work is almost always done with a familiar English rhythm, though very often with much added variety in rhyme-pattern and length of line. The warmth and richness of colour and feeling permitted by these rhymes alone strengthen the music incalculably.

On the Cliffs, the next poem in *Songs of the Springtides*, is another example. It is similar in rhythm and rhyme. Here, again, the poet speaks of his "winged white kinsfolk of the sea," and says "we sea-mews." And as he is half a bird, so the nightingale, whose song threads the poem, is half a woman, or rather more than half. He identifies Sappho and the nightingale, and addresses them separately or together, and sometimes as a "soul triune," "woman and god and bird," throughout the poem. But the identification is misty, perhaps

arbitrary, and never ceases to be a slight impediment to the reader, while the interspersed fragments of Sappho are both unintelligible in their places and ineffectual. Though *On the Cliffs* would gain by annotation, it does not fail to make a powerful, harmonious impression by means of a musical, passionate use of time, sea, night, and solitude, the poet, the poetess, and the bird, and a tracery of words more delicious to the faculties combined in reading than to the pure intelligence. Like *Thalassius* it is enriched by autobiography, which sometimes asks in its turn to be illuminated by intimate personal knowledge. As in *Thalassius*, the poet is dimly glorified. He is like the nightingale:

> My heart has been in thy heart, and my life
> As thy life is, a sleepless hidden thing,
> Full of the thirst and hunger of winter and spring,
> That seeks its food not in such love or strife
> As fill men's hearts with passionate hours and rest. . . .
> For all my days as all thy days from birth
> My heart as thy heart was in me or thee,
> Fire; and not all the fountains of the sea
> Have waves enough to quench it, nor on earth
> Is fuel enough to feed,
> While day sows night and night sows day for seed.

Child and bird have been "as brother and sister" since first her Lesbian word flamed on him. The "harmonious madness" which, as

Shelley foresaw and desired, is the result is not birdlike more than it is childlike or manlike. In the poet's own words, "light, sound and life are one" in it: it is like that song which he heard while swimming, with the sea-birds, his "bright born brethren," skimming overhead, a song of "earth and heaven and sea" molten together. It shifts periods and attitudes and moods, and combines them in a manner that needs a book of words if ever music did.

The Garden of Cymodoce, the next poem, is in the same metre, but varied with several different lyric verses. It begins with a prayer to the sea, to be:

> A spirit of sense more deep of deity,
> A light of love, if love may be, more strong
> In me than very song.

The first half makes music of an unnamed wild island, a garden that has snow-coloured spray for its petals, black rocks for its thorns. The verse, in spite of references to visible things, has only the visual effects of music. It does not build solidly, clearly, and fixedly; its rhythm and rhyme do not allow it; nor is it desirable that they should. Photography has convinced too many people that they see what the camera shows them. *The Garden of Cymodoce* is probably at least as near as a photograph to what a human being sees, that

is, provided the human being has not seen a photograph beforehand and known what to look for. But, alas! Victor Hugo sets foot on this fair island and he is celebrated, he the God and Master and Lord, and Napoleon III is abused,

> Whose reeking soul made rotten
> The loathed live corpse on earth once misbegotten.

Only to those who can allow Hugo to become a mythic figure, vast and vague, like the old warrior poet in *Thalassius*, will the whole poem be satisfactory. Still more is this ability necessary to excuse the *Birthday Ode for the Anniversary Festival of Victor Hugo, February 26, 1880*. Being Hugo's ever-ready self-chosen laureate was not much more profitable to poetry than being Edward the Seventh's. These birthday odes and the like are but poems in the manner of Swinburne, with everything of the original save the illusion, the transfiguration, the absolute and unbroken sense of music. It is a pity that he never said of this imitator as of the others, according to H. D. Traill:

> They strut like jays in my lendings,
> They chatter and screech: I sing.
> They mimic my phrases and endings,
> And rum Old Testament ring:
> But the lyrical cry isn't in it,
> And the high gods spot in a minute
> That it isn't the genuine thing.

In the year of this Birthday Ode, 1880, appeared his *Heptalogia;* or the Seven against Sense, with its parody of himself.

The *Century of Roundels* might at first seem a disappointing failure from a poet who so loved metre. But in fact they only prove how much there is beyond metre in his best work. The roundels are in fact nothing but roundels. The difference between them and his best work proves that they were written in a spirit of gay if loyal experiment, so that the best of them are the *Envoi*, bidding them "Fly, white butterflies, out to sea," and the roundel on the roundel:

A roundel is wrought as a ring or a starbright sphere
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unwrought,
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear
A roundel is wrought.

Its jewel of music is carven of all or of aught—
Love, laughter, or mourning—remembrance of rapture or fear—
That fancy may fashion to hang in the ear of thought.

As a bird's quick song runs round, and the hearts in us hear
Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught,
So moves the device whence, round as a pearl or tear,
A roundel is wrought.

With a public that suspects delight in technique for its own sake, the roundels tell a little against Swinburne, but they should tell still more in his favour because they make it so clear that in that mood of delight he was one half a

poet, that his fire was not one to be kindled at will, that the echoing and chiming of his words could not be equalled by mechanical regularity of recurrence. Yet some of the roundels are the prettiest saddest things alive; for if Swinburne did not seek all in writing them, he sacrificed nothing; and he was justified without referring to Hugo when he said in the Dedicatory Epistle to *Collected Poems:*

> A writer conscious of any natural command over the musical resources of his language can hardly fail to take such pleasure in the enjoyment of this gift or instinct as the greatest writer and the greatest versifer of our age must have felt at the highest possible degree when composing a musical exercise of such incomparable scope and fullness as "Les Djinns."

It may even be regretted that Swinburne did not always use this, or a similarly labelled form, when writing occasional or complimentary verses. Nearly all his poems to or about children are of this kind. Many stories of his devotion to children are told, and if any doubt of his love remained it should be dispelled by the last verse of "A Moss Rose," where he says that the best of all moss-roses is that where the flower is the face of a baby and the moss a bonnet of plush. Few of his children's poems can in fairness be offered except to other adorers. They abound in the "silly" tones perhaps

inevitable in one-sided affections. They are excessively one-sided, and the child is buried under the man's indiscriminate compliments. If the child appears he is delightful, as in *A Child's Pity*, where the poet tells how, after a piteous tale was read of a mother crocodile that was killed, hours after, the child—"our blithe small lord of Paradise," Swinburne calls him—was heard crying:

> He was so sorry, sitting still apart,
> For the poor little crocodiles, he said. . . .

Then the poet goes on to ask "what heavenliest angels of what heavenly city could match the heavenly heart in children here"? The crocodiles are delicious, but not poetry, any more than "what heavenliest angels . . ." is poetry.

A Midsummer Holiday was remarkable for a series of sketches after nature in ballade form. But even the strict bounds of the ballade did not give these sketches the unity and completeness, the independent life necessary to poetry. The form itself was wonderfully varied, and promoted to a new rank of scope and power: the landscape was very often gracious and sometimes perfectly felicitous as in the description of a wasting coast where earth is "a fruit rain-rotted to the core." But the form could not make poetry of these incidents, which in their turn were on such a scale and of such a nature

as rather to strain the form. Most of the other poems in this volume grew out of actual scenes and actual events, like many great poems, but are interesting perhaps only to readers with a particular knowledge of these scenes and events.

The third series of *Poems and Ballads* gave an unsurpassable exhibition of metrical experiments. They can only be judged when rendered by an excellent voice. "The Armada," for example, needs a "God-gifted organ voice of England" to recite it: without such a voice, the mere creeping intelligence intrudes and interrupts, making a fatal pause in the tempestuous tide of it. Read silently alone it loses the effect of combining and accumulating sound: at most, the words only give occasional transitory impulses to the spirit. In Swinburne's poetry the large groups of sounds and meanings are what count, and except in a short poem the eye and the mind cannot do these justice. Ear and mind are necessary. Possibly even *March: An Ode* would seem to have merit if declaimed as well as possible. Without that advantage *A Word with the Wind* is recognisable as a characteristic piece of Swinburne, each of the roundels of *Return* fills the mind like a bell stroke, and the *Ballad of Bath* is a stately flattery, but only the dialect poems and the lines *For Seamen* can

give up all that they have to give. *To a Sea-Mew* is different; it is in any case a spotless ecstasy in rhyme, but is doubled in value by its connection with Swinburne and the sea-mew at Beachy Head in September, 1886:

> Ah, well were I for ever
> Would'st thou change lives with me.

The poems in folk-ballad style are among the happiest of Swinburne's experiments in language and dialects other than his own. When he reviewed Rossetti's poems he praised Stratton Water but complained that "it is so far a copy that it seems hardly well to have gone so far and no further." Swinburne compromised by giving his phrases and his rhythms a sharper finish than is usual in the genuine ballads; otherwise he added nothing to place them among his best original work. *The Winds* is a perfect thing:

> O weary fa' the east wind,
> And weary fa' the west:
> And gin I were under the wan waves wide
> I wot weel wad I rest.
>
> O weary fa' the north wind,
> And weary fa' the south:
> The sea went ower my good lord's head
> Or ever he kissed my mouth.
>
> Weary fa' the windward rocks,
> And weary fa' the lee:
> They might hae sunken sevenscore ships,
> And let my love's gang free.

> And weary fa' ye, mariners a',
> And weary fa' the sea:
> It might hae taken an hundred men,
> And let my ae love be.

In poems like *The Ballad of Dead Men's Bay*, the ballad has merely modified Swinburne's customary style and produced an attractive form of simplicity. But Kingsley did at least as well in Airly Beacon. For dialect and for substance Tennyson's Northern Farmer is superior, because it enlarged the poet's range, while Swinburne's was actually narrowed.

Astrophel contained more of these experiments and perhaps an equal metrical variety. Some of this, as before, is of a kind that is three parts wasted if read in silence. Its sound is its chief sensuous element: read in silence the abstract nature of Swinburne's vocabulary is painfully apparent, and lines like:

> Faith, a splendour that hope makes tender, and truth, whose
> presage the soul divines—

call for the fundamental brainwork that brings to the verse nothing but calamity. Loud or silent, pieces like *Grace Darling* can hardly establish a claim to be more than commonplace thought decorated by enthusiasm in fancy dress. But the *Elegy* on Burton—not the lines *On the Death of Richard Burton*—is one of his masterpieces of richly imaged emotion, the *Threnody*

on P. B. Marston, one of his masterpieces of abstract contemplation made sensuous only by rhythm. *A Swimmer's Dream* can be seen even by the eye to be the finest of Swinburne's praises of swimming:

> A purer passion, a lordlier leisure,
> A peace more happy than lives on land,
> Fulfils with pulse of diviner pleasure
> The dreaming head and the steering hand.
> I lean my cheek to the cold grey pillow,
> The deep soft swell of the full broad billow,
> And close mine eyes for delight past measure,
> And wish the wheel of the world would stand. . . .

The ear makes it what the eye cannot make it—a dream in music; not the music of sweet words in which Swinburne is often deficient, but of rhythms and great images in harmony with them. *A Nympholept* is yet finer, but being longer suffers more from the mute and curious eye, for it allows the mind to resent the emphasis and the words which seem periphrastic rather than expressive. But in fact this poem, almost as long as if it were in praise of Hugo and not of Pan, has, diffused but unbroken throughout it, the magic unexpectedly revealed in those two lines of *Ave Atque Vale*:

> Such as the summer-sleepy dryads weave,
> Waked up by snow-soft sudden rains at eve.

All the description, the reflection, the magnifica-

tion, do not obscure this magic, but orchestrate it for the reader who has ears to hear and someone else to fill them with

Thine immanent presence, the pulse of thy heart's life, Pan.

Then he will not inquire why the wave should "reek" of the light that flickers or of the spray that flies, but will submit himself to the spirit of the hour—and of the poet—that subdues all to Pan:

And nought is all, as am I, but a dream of thee.

Keats could have put as much magic into one line; but then he wrote no long poem which sustains that magic until it possesses and enslaves the reader. He does no more than put an incantation into our lips which we use each according to his capacity. Swinburne's poem has no voice as of La Belle Dame Sans Merci, but a blare and blaze of music which is tyrannous, and allows a choice only between absolute submission and rejection. It is impossible to enjoy *A Nympholept* without this absolute submission—impossible to slip quietly into this brassy fairyland and out again. The effect lasts while the sound reverberates in the ears; for a time the mind is mazed, not altogether at ease. With the restoration of silence the experience seems unreal, a little theatrical, not wholly pleasant, and it cannot be recovered

without a repetition of the performance; nor will this invariably succeed; and if it does not succeed it will disgust. There is no such power in *Astrophel* where the metre is several times, or in *An Autumn Vision*, where it is seven times, changed, nor in *On the South Coast*, where the same verse is used throughout, as in *A Nympholept* itself.

As Swinburne came more frequently to attach his poems openly to definite persons, places and events, he wrote many memorial poems for lost friends, and it is worth noticing that he allowed himself much latitude of conjecture or assumption about death, and in exalting that unbodied monster consents to blaspheme earthly "life that is fettered in bonds of time and clasped with darkness about as is earth with sea." Instead of saying that Landor died, Swinburne used the phrase: "went to find his equals and rejoin his kin among the Grecian shades where Orpheus and where Homer are." This alone does not prove Swinburne's belief in the immortality of the soul any more than "God damn" proves a belief in God and Hell. But the phrase is not the only one superficially incompatible with Swinburne's statement that, like Landor himself, he thought the immortality of the soul an "utterly incognisable" matter "on which it is equally unreasonable to have, or wish to have, an

opinion." Nor, perhaps, is it incompatible with his retort—to one who rebuked him for blasphemy with the words, "You'll die like a dog, sir!"—"Oh, say a cat!" for nine lives might well have seemed to such a lover of life equivalent to immortality, whether "where Orpheus and where Homer are," or elsewhere.

It may fairly be urged that Swinburne's phrase about Landor was used ceremoniously of one who stood to him in place of a god. To strip some poets of all such ceremonious traditional phrases would leave them in rags, if not insufficiently covered for decency. But the words of poets cannot off-hand be accused as traditional and condemned as meaningless. No one would treat in this way, for example, the lines of Shelley:

> I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
> Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
> The soul of Adonais like a star,
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

Here the traditional "soul" and "abode where the Eternal are" commands more attention than Swinburne's posthumous abode of Orpheus, Homer and Landor. We feel that Shelley was not using these grand vague words only because grand vague words are impressive: nor perhaps was Swinburne when he described the swimmer's rapture, "the love of his body and soul for the

darkling delight of the soundless lake," and exclaimed:

Might life be as this and death be as life that casts off time as a robe,
The likeness of infinite heaven were a symbol revealed of the lake of Gaube.

This image sent him off thinking about "the spirit that is not breath," only to find that "deep silence answers," and to conclude:

But well shall it be with us ever
Who drive through the darkness here,
If the soul that we live by never,
For aught that a lie saith, fear.

The "lie" must be the lie of the priests about life after death.

Swinburne was fond of the variation of that "lie" which I began by quoting. He spoke of the inexhaustible labour of Victor Hugo's spirit ceasing "among us at least, for ever," and of that poet joining "the company of his equals." Sometimes he chose a different expression, quoting, for example, when he spoke of Byron's death: "He was a great man, good at many things, and now he has attained this also, to be at rest." But again and again he preferred to think of a sensible existence in some sort of Elysian fields rather than of horizontal peace. "If," he said, "as some thinkers or dreamers might venture to hope, those two great poets of the grave,

John Webster and Victor Hugo, have now met in a world beyond the grave . . ." In his poetry he ventured to indulge this hope time after time. He spoke of "shades of dead lords of music"; of Tennyson joining Shakespeare, of Trelawny —"surely"—rejoining Shelley, "if," that is, "hearts of the dead may hear"; of Barry Cornwall, on October 4, 1874, entering the garden of death, "where the singers whose names are deathless one with another make music unknown of men"; of P. B. Marston after death "haply" meeting Milton, who also was blind; of Aurelio Saffi being received by "the wider world of men that is not ours," and standing "in Dante's presence, by Mazzini's side": he bade Shakespeare, on June 27, 1901, "be glad in heaven above all souls ensphered" and "rejoice that still thy Stratford bears thy sign."

On the other hand, saluting Baudelaire, he asked the dead if it were well, and were there flowers or fruit where he was, but concluded by bidding him be content:

> For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
> All water as the shore.

So also James Lorimer Graham, when he died, "went to the dark where all is done." This is not less impressive than the idea of an Elysian reunion. Consequently it is not surprising that

the poet should sometimes combine the two, as in the lines *In Memory of Barry Cornwall*, where he spoke of the "soft long sleep" on the "broad sweet bosom of death" as well as of "the world of the dead men," rationalizing his belief or fancy by the reflection that the living may keep alive the powers of the dead. He liked to think of the departed reaching a "painless place." Once at least he admitted the love that desired to have the dead friend, P. B. Marston, alive, yet did not really desire it:

> Would not love him so worse than ill,
> Would not clothe him again with care;

Death had given him "at last good day," pain had "fallen on rest"; his friends knew that "the worst was his on earth"; nevertheless in this set of poems also he could not refrain from the fancy that "haply" the dead looked down from "afar above."

The words "if" and "haply" play a part in scores of passages concerning the dead and what happens to them. Once, in the dedication of *Astrophel* to William Morris, he spoke with confidence of learning when we die, "if death be or life be a lie"; which presumably means, whether death be an end or not; and he assumed that Sir Richard Burton, being dead, had "sought what world the light of death may show." He himself was still uncertain "if aught beyond

sweet sleep lie hidden, and sleep be sealed not fast on dead men's sight for ever," though he believed that the dead knew. Once he asked Death to let the dead send word "that if they wake their life is sweet as sleep"; immediately afterwards he expressed the belief that death could not give this grace. He said to the dead, "if ought thou knowest where now thou art," or "yet haply may not—and haply may—no sense abide of the dead sun's ray," or (in addressing a believer, Christina Rossetti) "If death do its trust no wrong." He repeated, "if the dead be alive," or "if ever a voice may be the same in heaven," or "if life there be that flies not"; and in the dedication of *A Channel Passage* to the memory of William Morris and Burne-Jones, he said, "if love do not utterly die," but confessed that of their sleep:

> We know not indeed if it be not
> What no man hath known if it be,
> Life quickened with light that we see not
> If spirits may see.

When his father died in 1877 he had said simply that he "knew not" if the dead one's life and spirit and work "here are done."

Sometimes while saying that "peace, rest, and sleep are all we know of death," he would add that "surely" the last sleep could not seal up for ever the "keen swift light" of the eyes,

or that "perchance" some "lovelier life" was theirs. Once at least, in thinking of a dead man, he speaks of the "roses," "music," and "angels" round the "shrine" of death, and hears Death answer:

> Night has given what day
> Denied him: darkness hath unsealed his eyes.

At other times he speaks of death lying dead, and takes refuge in phrases which seem to be derived from the words of Webster:

> We cease to grieve, cease to be fortune's slaves,
> Nay, cease to die by dying.

The death of Sir Richard Burton, for example, makes him speak of death delivering "from life that dies." Browning, by his death, "awakened out of life wherein we sleep." Theodore de Banville's life "dies and casts off death." P. B. Marston is "healed of life," no longer "suffers life"; Death for him is the "healer of life" and "sets the soul that love could set not free." Writing in memory of Aurelio Saffi, he speaks of "the deathless life of death which earth calls heaven." But of William Bell Scott's death he can only say that "Haply . . . not life but death may indeed be dead."

In one class of poems he casts off doubt. His love of children led him to pay them the tribute of feigning certainty. To a "baby kins-

woman" he spoke of her dead mother's eyes watching her "from Paradise," and imagines her "perchance" seeing them shine on her, though he afterwards confesses that he can "but deem or dream or guess thee not wholly motherless." One child, Olivia Madox Frances Rossetti, was "new-born" on earth just after Oliver Madox Brown was new-born in heaven. *A Baby's Epitaph* is spoken by the baby, whom "angels' have called "homeward," forbidding her "here to rest beguiled." Another *Baby's Death* caused him to speak of the "little soul" taking wing "with heaven again for goal"; but in a third poem he could only say that "perchance, though love knows naught," "guiding angels" had caught the little hands; in a sixth he said that "heaven" had "yearned" for the child "till angels hailed him there angel by name." When one of twins has died, he speaks of light breaking "haply . . . into newborn spirit," which is obscure. Even a living child he flatters with talk of angels; saying that a baby's feet might tempt an angel's lips to kiss them: to one he speaks of the angels as "your brothers"; to another he cries: "O child, what news from heaven?" One child makes him a believer to the point of exclaiming:

> If of such be the kingdom of heaven,
> It must be heaven indeed.

and affirming that "we see the children above us as they might angels above."

Writing of Blake's Auguries of Innocence, he calls it a series of "such divine epigrams as angels might be imagined to dictate, by way of a lesson for repetition to little children." This is a charming fancy, and confessed as such. Whether the fancies quoted from his poems on children are as charming may be a matter of opinion. Expressed as many of them are in the form of roundels question may be heavy-handed, but to me at least they seem, even so, insufficiently convinced, and not to be so readily excusable as those which sorrow prompts and the "monumentalist" more or less immortalizes in country churchyards. I would not have a poet disdain mythology, but if he shall handle it and it remain mechanical, unentwined with sincerity save of intention, he fails. In this way Swinburne has failed. Too often, if not always, his words are only words, involving scarce even a wish, or a passionate inability, to believe. For the poems on dead men there is more excuse. The fancies, superstitions or old beliefs were in part called up by the sorrow of indignation, pity, or regret. Yet the variety of solutions offered, or entertained, or, in some cases, accepted, is something too great, and it may be felt that the poet too easily laid hold

of what was pathetic or in some other way conventionally fit for poetry. Taken alone, the confession of ignorance, as in the verses on his father, is dignified and suitable, and so might any of the other attitudes have been; but Swinburne had assumed the part of elegist, and too often finding himself with little to say, or little that would go into his verses, he fell into a sort of professionalism in which he did merely better than other professionals.

Swinburne was happier in writing of death dramatically, and not upon a definite personal occasion. He used an even greater freedom of choice among the many states of bliss and pain, rest and annihilation, which have been fancied or believed to follow the stilling, stiffening, chilling, and silencing of the body. It is, for example, perfectly effective and natural when Chastelard, in the pride of his life, deliberately asking for death, reflects that he is to go "where a man lies with all his loves put out and his lips full of earth." Whatever his religion promised him, he knew that as a lover the sum of his fate was to be that. The lover's wish in *The Triumph of Time* is equally to be accepted. He desires to be dead and buried with his false mistress:

> Clasped and clothed in the cloven clay
> Out of the world's way, out of the light. . . .

and yet not wholly dead, but slumbering

dreamily, in a quiet where they would "laugh low, live softly, murmur and muse," and even something more. Or, he says, he will go down to the sea, his "mother," and find a grave, and "sleep and move with the moving ships," and know of nothing. The lust of a miserable one after an unimaginable tranquillity, an unimaginable annihilation, stirs emotion without surprise; and the same can be said of the utterly satisfied lover's feeling in the rondel, *Kissing Her Hair*, that nothing could be added to him, save perhaps death, which I suppose is regarded as in some magnificent way dignifying and solemnizing without destroying. Iseult, in *Tristram of Lyonesse*, thinks of a Hell where she would be happy if only she knew that her lover was with God; and, on the other hand, if he is to join her in Hell he will not be disconsolate with such love as hers. At another time she thinks there would be some joy in death, to be made one with Nature, and "lost in the sun's light and the all-girdling sea," forgotten and forgetting —nay, she would not forget all things. The poet himself thinks of death for them otherwise. He speaks of Tristram sailing home "to sleep in home-born earth at last," and when the end comes it will deliver them to "perpetual rest . . . from bondage and the fear of time set free." He imagines for them a kind of happiness and

distinction in lying dead at peace so near the sea, troubled by nothing, whatever "fear or fancy saith." Then he allows himself the pleasure of thinking what a "sublime sweet sepulchre" the sea would be, and forthwith he supposes their grave swallowed up by the waters:

> But peace they have that none may gain who live,
> And rest about them that no love can give,
> And over them, while death and life shall be,
> The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

Like the lover in *The Triumph of Time*, he thinks of this as in some sort a noble peace. One of his few solely and explicitly personal poems, *Ex Voto*, expresses the poet's own preference for such a grave, if he might choose. In his last hour, he says, he would pray for this one thing from "the birth-god of his day," that he should not lie in the earth, but in "a bed of larger girth, chaster and colder." For, he protests, he was not earth's child, but the sea's, bred by her and "the wind, her brother," having in his veins like wine her "sharp salt blood"; and he recalls how once he was near drowned, and how he was glad it was the sea that offered him "death to drink." He compares the earth to the sea which never even seems to be subject and not free. The sea slakes all thirst for ever, and, rising to a strange ecstasy at this thought, the poet begs

the sea to take him, alive or dead, when his time shall come. Though Shelley's fate and the several verses where he seems to foretell it may have had some share in begetting Swinburne's poem, which was ignored, as it fell out, both by the sea and by his birth-god, *Ex Voto* has in it something of an instinctive rapture, such as cannot be felt in Swinburne's other thoughts on death. It is not enough to forbid the conclusion that neither divination nor meditation taught him anything new, or revived in him with fresh force anything old, on what is hereafter.

Swinburne's last volume of poems, *A Channel Passage and Other Poems*, was made up of the same elements as the former books, but having a large proportion of pieces openly or obviously connected with various occasions political or private. The hand had not lost its cunning; here and there the grace was beautiful; over several poems like *The Altar of Righteousness*, lay a solemnity with a new shade of seriousness in it; the heroics of the prologues to a number of Elizabethan plays were clear and strong. But except in the dedication, the volume is weaker as well as graver and more even in tone. Perhaps no quality can be missed except that which came of the happy combination of all the others. The poet piped and the words danced; it had never been a matter of words only or the

last would now have been as the first. His power had lasted for full thirty years, up to the *Tale of Balen* in 1896. It is even possible that another subject like the story of Balen would have helped his powers to combine even later than 1896.

IX

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE: THE TALE OF BALEN

SWINBURNE'S two long verse narratives show his powers at a height only excelled in a score of his best short poems, since whatever the narrative form refused to him which the lyric could not have done—and that was little—the old tales of Tristram and Balen made up for it, and he interwove with them the richest of his own spirit-stuff. *Tristram of Lyonesse* followed two years after *Songs of the Springtides*, and with them represents a brilliant middle period in Swinburne's art, when, in the earlier forties of his age, he was able to combine the ardour of *Songs Before Sunrise* with the richness of the first *Poems and Ballads*. In undertaking to "rehandle the deathless legend of Tristram," he says, his aim was "simply to present that story, not diluted and debased as it has been in our own time by other hands, but undefaced by improvement and undeformed by transformation, as it was known to the age of Dante wherever the chronicles of

romance found hearing, from Ercildoune to Florence; and not in the epic or romantic form of sustained and continuous narrative, but mainly through a succession of dramatic scenes or pictures with descriptive settings or backgrounds. . . ." It is not, in fact, a fresh creative work upon the foundation of the old tale, but a series of lyrical studies from it which do in fact present the main outlines in such a way as to make a prior knowledge unnecessary, but yield all their fullest savours to those who know and love the tale like the poet. Those who do not thus know and love it may think it buried deep under the inessential magnificence of the poet's enthusiasm and sympathy with each stage of the tale. He has given out of his life to make their dead life live some days of his. Swinburne himself seems to be in love with Iseult, to give her the amorous adoration which had small outlet in the books since *Chastelard* and *Poems and Ballads.* He loves her before Tristram; he pictures her body when yet her love

> Watched out its virgin virgil in soft pride
> And unkissed expectation

as if he were watching her as Lorenzo watched Madeleine on St. Agnes' Eve. The narrative core of the poem is sound and good, but the whole is a praise of love that mingles the lofty

fervour of Epipsychidion with the sensual fervour of Carew's Rapture.

In the first line of the Prelude he sings of

> Love that is first and last of all things made,
> The light that has the living world for shade . . .

and how love brought these two lovers to death:

> Through many and lovely days and much delight
> Led those twain to the lifeless light of night.

"Yea, but what then?" he asks, and in the thought of the great love of famous lovers he is rapt away and would believe, and have us agree, that their fame

> Till story and song and glory and all things sleep

is as it were a satisfying heaven in which they re-enact their love before us to a glorious amorous music. Tristram tells Iseult love-tales before their love begins, and she compares herself with the women of the tales, in one beautiful scene measuring her height against the mast, and at the end exclaims:

> What good is it to God that such should die?

He sings her love songs and still she loves him but "in holy girlish wise," until the love potion makes their four lips "one burning mouth." Thenceforward the poem is a frenzy of bodily love either desirous or in mid-rapture, against a background of keen air, wild lands, tempestuous and rockbound sea, with crying of hunt and

battle, "and many a large delight of hawk and hound. Alone together at night in summer,

> Only with stress of soft fierce hands she prest
> Between the throbbing blossoms of her breast
> His ardent face, and through his hair her breath
> Went quivering as when life is hard on death;
> And with strong trembling fingers she strained fast
> His head into her bosom; till at last,
> Satiate with sweetness of that burning bed
> His eyes afire with tears he raised his head
> And laughed into her lips; and all his heart
> Filled hers; then face from face fell, and apart
> Each hung on each with panting lips, and felt
> Sense into sense and spirit in spirit melt.
> "Hast thou no sword? I would not live till day;
> O love, this night and we must pass away,
> It must die soon, and let not us die late."

Here echoes, "Ah God! Ah, God! that day should be so soon" from *Poems and Ballads;* yet the poet and Tristram do not deny

> Glory and grace and reverence and delight
> To wedded woman by her bridal right.

Doubly splendid in contrast with all the soft sweetness and bitterness of love, which is in its turn all the softer for it, comes:

> The breeze, the bloom, the splendour and the sound,
> That stung like fire the hunter and the hound,
> The pulse of wind, the passion of the sea,
> The rapture of the woodland. . . .

This interchange of "the lovely fight of love and

sleep" with the open air makes up for the lack of drama and continuous narrative.

As Tristram and Iseult are never anything but passionate so nothing in Nature is loveless or unrapturous. Thus, the hovering sea-gull turns:

With eyes wherein the keen heart glittering yearns
Down toward the sweet green sea whereon the broad moon burns,
And suddenly, soul-stricken with delight,
Drops, and the glad wave gladdens. . . .

Even drowned men are called "sleepers in the soft green sea," as if they had some joy of it. The wastes of Wales are "wild glad" wastes of "glorious" Wales. The spear thirsts and the sword is hungry. The sea takes the sun "on her bare bright bosom as a bride." The arms of Tristram swimming are "amorous," and the touch of his lips and the wave is a "sharp sweet minute's kiss." The leaves of Broceliande are "full of sweet sound, full of sweet wind and sun."

This alternation of Love and Nature, except for one who persists in wanting a tale, is strong enough almost to hide some of the few points where Swinburne has kept the tale well in view, as where he reminds us that the night when Iseult of Ireland is praying to God, and at the same time saying:

Blest am I beyond women even herein,
That beyond all born women is my sin,

was the night when Iseult of Brittany married Tristram, "a maiden in a marriage bower." Nor are such points necessary. Swinburne's love of Iseult and her lover, his joy to be with them in Northumberland, riding together, the rapture which he shares with Tristram in swimming, his satisfaction when at last in death their four lips make "one silent mouth" and he can give them a "sublime sweet sepulchre" under the sea, these sympathies make us well content that he should merely give us the fragments of the story and spend himself in magnifying them and giving them a golden atmosphere. I should have been glad to do without the methodical nightly substitution of Bragwaine for Iseult in the bed of Mark; above all, without the letter, found after his death, in which Tristram is alleged to have explained that their love had been "no choice of will, but chance and sorcerous art" and to have prayed for pardon, which was given by Mark with tears.

These things only speck the mighty lyric, which sometimes swoons with its own extravagance but never drops until it reaches

> The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

Rightly does Swinburne call Iseult and Tristram "my lovers," "my twain." Their love, their youth, their beauty are equal in splendour

to the sun, the sea, the liberty, which he so loved. All his characteristic ways with words help to enrich the poem, chiming of words, repetition, duplication and balancing of words and thoughts, abundance of full vowels and especially of the vowel of "light" and "fire." The lines are massive or rapid, often composed of monosyllables, broken up in every possible way and frequently extended to alexandrines, while the rhymes are frequently in triplets instead of pairs; when he once adopts one or both of these variations, he does so several times in fairly close succession, just as when he once begins a line with an important word, usually accented on the first syllable, and often carried over abruptly from the preceding line, he does so two or three times, for example, here:

> . . . Shattered from his steed
> Fell, as a mainmast ruining, Palamede,
> Stunned. . . .

He uses a pair of lines similar but different, at irregular intervals, to break in as a sea-burden upon Iseult's prayer with a sound of storm, and uses it effectively.

Doing without much action he inevitably falls into excessive multiplication without variety. When Tristram has said that Iseult's hands used to be more to him than watersprings to shadeless lands he says also what her hair, her mouth and

her breast used to be, and so everywhere. When Iseult has been listening to Tristram's story and sighs and sees the sun at that moment rise up, the sun's face burns against hers like a lover's: but also the sea shone and shivered like angels' wings; a wind shook the foam flowers as a rainfall of sea roses, for the foam was like blossoms; the moon withered as a face in a swoon; the air was moved with delight and passion as of love, until air, light and wave seemed full of beating rest like a new-mated dove's heart, and had a motion as of one God's beating breast.

Everything is done which can make the poem everywhere grand or sumptuous, and inevitably, since all comes from Swinburne, it is at times stiff and heavy laden. Every inch is Swinburne's. Compare it with Romeo and Juliet. There the love and beauty is so much beyond the sum of the details, that beautiful as they often are the effect of the whole astonishes and makes the words seem the servants of greater spirits. No catalogue of beautiful things and no cabinet of beautiful words can produce beauty, and Swinburne's poem is far more than a catalogue or a cabinet; but the total result of his expenditure is not astonishing or disproportionate. Shakespeare uses the breath of life, Swinburne uses gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But compare it with Laon and Cythna and Endymion and it is at least as readable and exuberant. Few poets have more gold, frankincense, and myrrh to offer, and having the breath of life strong within himself he uses them successfully to sweeten and to adorn. His dangling sentences, his use of addition instead of development, his abuse of some of his favourite habits or devices of style, are not in excess of what is to be expected in the work of a man's hands. He undertook a lesser adventure than Tennyson in the Idylls; having made no attempt to lift his hero and heroine out of an "impossible age of an imaginary world" he avoids Tennyson's failure. He creates nothing, but his songs about these well-beloved shadows constitute him one of their most perfect lovers, and in English at least their most perfect poet.

The Tale of Balen, dedicated to his mother in his fifty-ninth year, was the fine flower of Swinburne's later work. By comparison with *Tristram* it is naked narrative, and as near as possible to the tale of Malory. From the Lady of Shalott and the lovely fragment of Launcelot and Guinevere he took the metre which made entire nakedness of narrative impossible. Tennyson's own version of Balin and Balan, where the story is moralized to death with (I believe)

no gain to morality, helped him if at all only by provocation. In Tennyson's poem the deaths of the brothers were due to a fit of Balen's temper which he had earnestly striven to correct. Swinburne retained the "custom of the castle" by which Balan had to fight with every comer, and at last with Balen who was concealed under strange armour. This irrational, but not unlife-like and certainly imposing, fate brings an end not less symbolic in its beauty now than it could have seemed in the fifteenth century, and we are satisfied when Merlin writes the brothers' names on the tomb and weeps:

> For all his heart within him yearned
> With pity like as fire that burned.
> The fate his fateful eye discerned
> Far off now dimmed it, ere he turned
> His face toward Camelot, to tell
> Arthur of all the storms that woke
> Round Balen, and the dolorous stroke,
> And how that last blind battle broke
> The consummated spell.
> "Alas," King Arthur said, "this day
> I have heard the worst that woe might say:
> For in this world that wanes away
> I know not two such knights as they."
> This is the tale that memory writes
> Of men whose names like stars shall stand,
> Balen and Balan, sure of hand,
> Two brethren of Northumberland,
> In life and death good knights.

Swinburne himself hardly intervenes, yet Balen

is conspicuously tinged by his preferences. Tennyson appears to translate "le sauvage" as "bad-tempered": Swinburne's hero is "called the Wild by knights whom kings and courts make tame. . . ." He was, like the poet himself, "a northern child of earth and sea"; and often the knight's mood and Nature's have that brightness which he loved to praise. Everywhere are "moors and woods that shone and sang," a "sunbright wildwood side," "bright snows," "wild bright" coasts, "storm bright" lands, and pride of summer with "lordly laughter in her eye"; men "drink the golden sunlight's wine with joy's thanksgiving that they live"; even Tristram is "bright and sad and kind"; and round Balen shines a brief "light of joy and glory." Nothing could be more characteristic of Swinburne out of doors, and away from love and Victor Hugo, than this opening of a Canto:

> In Autumn, when the wind and sea
> Rejoice to live and laugh to be,
> And scarce the blast that curbs the tree
> And bids before it quail and flee
> The fiery foliage, where its brand
> Is radiant as the seal of spring,
> Sounds less delight, and waves a wing
> Less lustrous, life's loud thanksgiving
> Puts life in sea and land.
> High hope in Balen's heart alight
> Laughed. . . .

All this brightness is quenched once and for ever in perfect gloom.

The story is clearly and fully told, with only such praise and dalliance as is necessary to depict the background of earth loved by knight and poet, and to flatter the graces of the stanza. Each Canto begins "In hawthorn time," or "In linden time," "In autumn," "In winter," or the like, without confounding or obscuring the tale. The stanza causes a good deal of length and roundaboutness, but seldom fails to be gracious. It can be grand also, as where Balen knows that he shall die:

> Nor fate nor fear might overcast
> The soul now near its peace at last.
> Suddenly, thence as forth he past,
> A mighty and a deadly blast
> Blown of a hunting horn he heard,
> As when the chase hath nobly sped.
> "That blast is blown for me," he said,
> "The prize am I who am yet not dead,'
> And smiled upon the word.

Thenceforward there is no delay; all is knightly act and speech, of a ballad dignity yet with no mere simpleness.

Those who read the tale here for the first time will never be in difficulty and rarely impatient. Those who know it in Malory and have sought it in Tennyson will go to *The Tale of Balen* for the lustrous background and for the con-

tinuous but not monotonous pleasure of the stanza, but also for the constant nobility of temper; for some tenderness like that where the deadly-wounded Balan crawls on hands and knees towards Balen, as when:

> Beneath their mother's eye had he,
> A babe that laughed with joy to be,
> Made toward him standing by her knee
> For love's sake long ago. . . .

Sometimes the metrical form is allowed its own way, to form perfect stanzas lovable for their own sakes: as often the narrative sweeps through the verses without submitting to them, yet without shattering them. It becomes too often abstract, even fantastically so, as here:

> And seeing that shame and peril, fear
> Bade wrath and grief awake and hear
> What shame should say in fame's wide ear
> If she, by sorrow sealed more dear
> Than joy might make her, so should die. . . .

but otherwise the style is less mannered and has gained simplicity from its theme and from the stanza perhaps some sweetness. The characteristic play of words is not always happy, but is only once as unhappy as in the line about the wave bounding on the land and confounding

> The bounding bulk whereon it bounds.

The success of this narrative, the failure of many

of his lyric, descriptive and reflective poems written before it, and of all written after it, proves that Swinburne owed much to the tangible substratum of an old tale and justifies a regret that he did not more often trust it.

X

THE PLAYS

After *Balen* came a drama, *Rosamond, Queen of the Lombards*, after that *A Channel Passage*, but Swinburne's last book, *The Duke of Gandia*, was another drama. He began with plays, *Rosamond*, and *The Queen Mother*, and *Chastelard;* he ended with a play. The first had some qualities of the lyrics belonging to the same period, because the lovers who were their heroes and heroines gave practice and excuse for Swinburne's amorous extravagance before he appeared himself as a lyric lord of love. When once he had so appeared he seems to have neglected drama for many years. It was not until 1874, three years after *Songs Before Sunrise*, that *Bothwell* was published. He dedicated it like *Chastelard* to Hugo, "as a river gives up to the sea its soul." In this dedication he called it an "epic drama," and years afterwards while approving this title he spoke of it as less a tragedy than a "chronicle history." It was what he called it, an "ambitious, conscientious,

and comprehensive piece of work"; yet for a nineteenth-century lyric poet, in an age without a poetic drama, to revive a form early discarded by Elizabethan dramatists, was an adventure more grim than serious. That he read it aloud to his friends without causing any suffering that has yet become famous is a superb testimony to his voice, to his character, and to his friends. For *Bothwell* is four times as long as *Chastelard*, and contains four-hundred-line speeches. It is a monstrous achievement, the most solemn proof existing of Swinburne's power of fundamental brainwork. The self-sacrifice was little short of crucifixion. The style, for example, is allowed to retain hardly more than the tricks of his characteristic style, some chiming vowels, here and there a phrase like "clothed and crowned with force and fear," or "wiles and songs and sins," or a passage of vowels like:

> But I would not be weary, let that be
> Part of my wish. I could be glad and good
> Living so low, with little labours set
> And little sleeps and watches, night and day
> Falling and flowing as small waves in low sea
> From shine to shadow and back and out and in
> Among the firths and reaches of low life:
> I would I were away and well. . . .

But it is a compromise between his lyric style and a kind of average dramatic blank verse which does not eschew dullness. Even the lyric

metre of *Anima Anceps* is a little withered by the shadow:

> Lord Love went Maying
> Where Time was playing,
> In light hands weighing
> Light hearts with sad;
> Crowned king with peasant,
> Pale past with present,
> Harsh hours with pleasant,
> Good hopes with bad;
> Nor dreamed how fleeter
> Than Time's swift metre,
> O'er all things sweeter
> How clothed with power,
> The murderess maiden
> Mistrust walks laden
> With red fruit ruined and dead white flower. . . .

Mary's speech after Rizzio's singing is pretty as the speeches so often are after the songs:

> What does Death i' the song?
> Can they not let love live, but must needs make
> His grave with singing? 'Tis the trick of the song
> That finds no end else.

Rizzio answers:

> An old trick;
> Your merrier songs are mournfuller sometimes
> Than very tears are.

At a hundred points Mary's words show how fondly and carefully the poet followed her, as when she says:

Ay, we were fools, we Maries twain. . . .
I am not tired of that I see not here,
The sun and the large air, and the sweet earth. . . .

But the play, with all its conscientious study of characters and events, its chaste workmanship, its many flowers, is intolerable when we think what Swinburne could have done with this subject in narrative, spending himself in rhyme and rhythm and feeling directly upon Mary, instead of indirectly.

Mary Stuart, dedicated, like the other two portions of the trilogy, to Hugo, appeared between *Songs of the Springtides* and *Tristram of Lyonesse*, a favourable time when Swinburne's genius was ripe and still ardent. There is some unspoilt witness to its period, as when Mary at Chartley cries:

O,
That I were now in saddle . . . new-mounted now
I shall ride right through shine and shade of spring
With heart and habit of a bride, and bear
A brow more bright than fortune . . . ;

and when a little afterwards she sings:

"An ye maun braid your yellow hair,"

and Mary Beaton remembers singing it after her nurse, and weeping upon it "in France at six years old to think of Scotland"; or when the Queen thinks of the moors in comparison with the midlands:

> There the wind and sun
> Make madder mirth by midsummer, and fill
> With broader breadth and lustier length of light
> The heartier hours that clothe for even and dawn
> Our bosom-belted billowy-blossoming hills
> Where hearts break out in laughter like the sea
> For miles of heaving heather . . . ;

or when Chastelard's song—which she thinks Remy Belleau's—sung by Mary Beaton at Fotheringay, makes her think of her French years:

> Laughter of love and lovely stress of lutes,
> And in between the passion of them borne
> Sounds of swords crossing ever, as of feet
> Dancing, and life and death still equally
> Blithe and bright-eyed from battle . . .

or when Barbara describes the last minutes of the Queen to Mary Beaton, until the very last when the listener uncovers her eyes to see for herself:

> He strikes awry: she stirs not. Nay, but now
> He strikes aright, and ends it.

But as a rule the speech is made roundabout or dull by the blank verse and the Elizabethan influence; the dangling relative clauses may be true to the characters of Sir Amyas Faulet and Sir Drew Drury, but even so are an unpardonable realism. The trick of repeating "all," here and in several other places:

> By minds not always all ignobly mad
> Nor all made poisonous by false grain of faith,
> She shall be a world's wonder to all time . . .

is a poor compensation for the loss of what gives life to *Thalassius, On the Cliffs*, and *Tristram of Lyonesse*, and cannot save the play from being a conscientious versification of facts and conjectures, in which only one half of the poet was employed. Even into the prose of the pseudonymous *A Year's Letters* he had put as much of himself and at least as much of his knowledge of men and women and old women, and that in a form sufficient in itself and never tedious.

Marino Faliero gave Swinburne an outlet for his hate of God and king and priest, his love of Man, Liberty, Tyrannicide, Italy, Mazzini, and of the Sea. But it is hard to see why Swinburne should thus deface speech without making it poetry:

> Sir,
> For one wrong done you, being but man as we,
> If wrath make lightning of your life, in us,
> For all wrongs done of all our lords alive
> Through all our years of living, doubt you not
> But wrath shall climb as high toward heaven, and hang
> As hot with hope of thunder.

It is not Swinburne, and it is not Shakespeare, it is not speech, and it is not poetry; it is the product of an attempt to combine all four. Often he puts noble words into the mouth of

a noble man, and the last speech has a prophetic grandeur:

> I go not as a base man goes to Death,
> But great of hope: God cannot will that here
> Some day shall spring not Freedom: nor perchance
> May we, long dead, not know it, who died of love
> For dreams that were and truths that were not. Come:
> Bring me toward the landing whence my soul
> Sets sail, and bid God speed her forth to sea.

Yet he could have signified his admiration of *Marino Faliero* in a briefer or less mutilated fashion, by enveloping him, like Tristram or Balen, in a great love or wrath of verse. The verse here is by no means negligible; some of the variations are original and definitely extend blank verse. But though written "with a view to being acted at the Globe, the Red Bull, or the Black Friars" before audiences, "incredibly intelligent" and "inconceivably tolerant," which accepted Chapman's eloquence instead of study of character and interest of action, it has to be read in silence, and therefore with greater need of intelligence and tolerance. It seems to me to resurrect of an old form simply the archaism, to make a tomb for eloquence.

Swinburne took more liberty in his next play. Perhaps Greene's tragedy of Selimus, which contains scenes in the verse forms of Don Juan and Venus and Adonis, suggested the far more

cunning and far more various schemes of rhyme in *Locrine*. It begins with couplets, but with each scene the rhyming is changed, though the lines remain decasyllabic, until the last restores the couplets: in the first scene of the fifth act the scheme is that of a Shakespearean sonnet. The story of "Sabrina fair" was a "wan legend" like that of Tristram and Balen, and the poet did not think that any life or life-likeness possessed by it had "suffered from the bondage of rhyme or been sacrificed to the exigence of metre." The rhyming in fact helps to confine the "wan legend" within strait limits and to remind the reader of the fact. Only a consummate artist could have made this choice and so justified it. He tells the tale and he finds abundant good excuse for such indulgence as in her mother Estrild's speech to Sabrina:

> . . . Thou hast seen the great sea never, nor canst dream
> How fairer far than earth's most lordly stream
> It rolls its royal waters here and there,
> Most glorious born of all things anywhere,
> Most fateful and most godlike: fit to make
> Men love life better for the sweet sight's sake
> And less fear death if death for them should be
> Shrined in the sacred splendours of the sea
> As God in heaven's mid mystery. . . .

Estrild's song, "Had I wist, quoth spring to the swallow," calls forth still prettier speeches from the child Sabrina:

> . . . Methought, though one were king or queen
> And had the world to play with, if one missed
> What most were good to have, such joy, I ween,
> Were woeful as a song with sobs between,
> And well might wail for ever, "Had I wist!" . . .

But rhyme, dramatic form, and the "wan legend" bring about an extraordinary thinness in *Locrine*, lightness and transparent thinness. The deaths of Locrine, Estrild, and Sabrina, and the sudden repentance of the Queen Gwendolen, are neat and beauteous in accordance with this light, thin manner.

"The tragedy of *The Sisters*," wrote Swinburne, "however defective it may be in theatrical interest or progressive action, is the only modern English play I know in which realism in the reproduction of natural dialogue and accuracy in the representation of natural intercourse between men and women of gentle birth and breeding have been found or made compatible with expression in genuine if simple blank verse." It was an odd ambition to twist and confine the very speech of ordinary modern people within the limits of decasyllabic lines. The result was that the descasyllabic lines were usually decasyllabic lines and nothing more, while the speech was made to look trivial or weak, because it was without the concentration, and that colouring from the inexpressible, which are essential to dramatic poetry. By writing:

But if she does
Love you—if you can win her—as I think
(There!)—you're the happiest fellow ever born. . . .

he tried to prove that his class talked in blank verse, and sometimes as here:

Woodlands too we have,
Have we not, Mabel? beech, oak, aspen and pine,
And Redgie's old familiar friend, the birch,
With all its blithe lithe bounty of buds and sprays
For hapless boys to wince at, and grow red,
And feel a tingling memory prick their skins—
Sting till their burning blood seems all one blush. . . .

to prove that they loved the chime and the birch as well as he did. What he does prove, as in *Love's Cross Currents*, is that, in the flesh, men of the Eton-and-Army and outdoor type, frank, simple and chivalrous, and women to match, appealed to him. When two of them, lovers, are dying from poison accidentally taken, they converse in this manner:

Reginald: Think we are going to see
Our mother, Mabel—Frank's and ours.
Mabel: I will.
But, Reginald, how hard it is to go!
Reginald: We have been so happy, darling, let us die
Thinking of that, and thanking God.
Mabel: I will.
Kiss me. Ah, Redgie. (*Dies.*)
Reginald: Mabel! I am here. (*Dies.*)
Sir Arthur: They could have lived no happier than they die.

This can hardly be taken as a contribution to the natural history of the upper classes, but rather as a testimony to a poet's sentimental esteem of them, and of the religion, the tradition and the birch that make them, like those two brethren of Northumberland, "in life and death good knights." The jealous woman who causes the tragedy is false to the type. She is allowed to soliloquize in blank verse that is not common speech, a concession that emphasizes the tame and literal naturalism of the greater part.

Rosamond, Queen of the Lombards, written when Swinburne was past sixty, is one of his best plays. The revenge taken by Rosamond upon the king for being asked to pledge the health of his kingdom in a cup made of the skull of her father, whom he had slain in battle, forms a tragic story, simple and brief. Its brevity and simplicity help Swinburne to his best compromise between his own style and that of an Elizabethan dramatist. Enjambment like this:

I
Love her. . . .

is too often used without any such effect as it gave to Shelley in:

Is this the scene
Where the old earthquake demon taught her young
Ruin?

the "spirit of sense" recurs twice; God and the priests are despitefully treated; but the mannerisms are no bar to force and rapidity. The poet's most noticeable intervention is the device of casting over the play, and chiefly over the deceit by which Rosamond turns the king's favourite warrior into her seducer and her avenger, the "mad might of midsummer." The warrior, Almachildes, when told that it was not his mistress who had shared his bed, asks:

> Art not thou—
> Or am not I—sunsmitten through the brain
> By this mad might of midsummer?

The king himself, in a scene where Rosamond plays with her avenger and her victim tragically and ironically, cries:

> I would this fierce Italian June were dead . . .;

and again in the banqueting hall at his last hour:

> This June makes babes of men . . . when the heat
> Burns life half out of us.

He asks Almachildes if his memory is "burnt out by stress of summer," putting down all that is strange to that; when he is about to take the cup and drink to the queen he reflects that there are "but two days more for June to burn and live." "Queen," he says, "I drink to thee."

She thanks him and bids a counsellor give him the cup, saying: "Women slain by fire thirst not as I to pledge thee." Almachildes rises and stabs him, and with the words, "Thou, my boy?" he dies. Then says Rosamond:

> I. But he hears not. Now, my warrior guests,
> I drink to the onward passage of his soul
> Death. Had my hand turned coward or played me false,
> This man that is my hand, and less than I
> And less than he bloodguilty, this my death
> Had been my husband's: now he has left it me.
> (*Drinks.*)
> How innocent are all but he and I
> No time is mine to tell you. Truth shall tell.
> I pardon thee, my husband: pardon me. (*Dies.*)

and the old counsellor says:

> Let none make moan. This doom is none of man's.

Swinburne had, in fact, written a play admirably like those which he had been imitating since he wrote *The Queen Mother*. Among his many experiments in foreign languages and in archaic forms, *Rosamond, Queen of the Lombards*, is one of the most perfect.

His last play, four brief scenes, in which Cæsar Borgia procures the death of his brother Francesco, Duke of Gandia, must have been written chiefly for the pleasure of blasphemous laughter at the intricate relationships of the Borgia family. When Vanozza, the Pope's

mistress, tells her son Francesco that he is over fond, Cæsar says:

> Nay, no whit.
> Our heavenly father on earth adores no less
> Our mother than our sister: and I hold
> His heart and eye, his spirit and his sense,
> Infallible.

The contrast between Cæsar's licentiousness and shrewdness and his father's heavier and kindlier worldliness, Francesco going among the assassins singing:

> Love and night are life and light:
> Sleep and wine and song
> Speed and slay the halting day
> Ere it live too long:

Lucrezia being flattered by her father—the father's dread, and then his grief at the news of Francesco's murder—Cæsar's scornful banter—do not make a play. The excessively mannered verses produce an effect something like one of Lucian's Dialogues of the gods, though the loose and lengthy method obscures the effect and lessens the credit of it. With good speaking, dresses and scenery, it might prove amusing, but so might a thousand other dialogues. It was not a brilliant conclusion: it was more in the nature of a posthumous indiscretion: but it was a sally characteristic of the poet, the climber, swimmer and rider, the lover of women and

sunlight, of the Sea and Liberty, who died a year afterwards, on April 10, 1909. He was buried in the rocky cemetery at Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, near the home and the sea of his boyhood, of the days when he was chanting *Atalanta in Calydon*, celebrated often in his poetry and lastly in the dedication of *The Sisters* to his aunt, the Lady Mary Gordon. The garden of her house, The Orchard, near Ventnor, had been to him one of the sweetest corners of the island, and recalling it in that dedication he connected it for the generations of his lovers with himself and the sea:

> The springs of earth may slacken, and the sun
> Find no more laughing lustre to relume
> Where once the sunlight and the spring seemed one;
> But not on heart or soul may time or doom
> Cast aught of drought or lower with aught of gloom
> If past and future, hope and memory, be
> Ringed round about with love, fast bound and free,
> As all the world is girdled with the sea.

THE END

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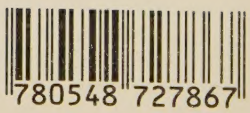

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